

THE MAHARANA BHUPAL  
COLLEGE LIBRARY  
UDAIPUR

# MODERN ANTHOLOGIES

*General Editor—Richard Wilson, D.Litt.*

## MODERN PROSE

UNIFORM WITH THIS BOOK

- No. 2. *Biography.* Edited by Lord David Cecil.
- No. 3. *Drama.* Edited by S. R. Littlewood.
- No. 4. *Poetry.* Edited by Robert Lynd.
- No. 5. *Memoirs.* Edited by F. W. Tickner.
- No. 6. *Nature Writing.* Edited by Henry Williamson.
- No. 7. *Travel.* Edited by H. M. Tomlinson.
- No. 8. *Fiction.* Edited by Frank Swinnerton.
- No. 9. *Animal Writing.* Edited by Frances Pitt.

# AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN PROSE

*Edited by*  
A. J. J. Ratcliff



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS LTD  
London Edinburgh Paris Melbourne  
Toronto New York

*First published, July 1936*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THANKS are due, and are hereby tendered, to the following publishers and authors for permission to use extracts from the volumes named hereunder :

Messrs. Arthur Barker, Ltd., and Mr. Robert Graves for " I, Claudius " ; Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd., for " Magnus Merriman " by Eric Linklater, and " The Stream " by E. H. Young ; Messrs. Cassell and Co., Ltd., for " The Unforgotten Prisoner " by R. C. Hutchinson ; Messrs. Chatto and Windus for " The Grasshoppers Come " and " Pocahontas " by David Garnett ; The Clarendon Press, Oxford, for " Modern Prose Style " by Bonamy Dobrée ; Messrs. R. Cobden-Sanderson, Ltd., for " The Cherry Tree " by Adrian Bell ; Mr. Roger Dattall for " Uncouth Swain," " A Pitman looks at Oxford," and " Oxford into Coalfield " ; Messrs. J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., for " Miner " by F. C. Boden, and Messrs. Dent and Mr. Richard Church for " The Apple of Concord " ; Messrs. Faber and Faber, Ltd., for " The Innocent Eye " by Herbert Read, " A Superficial Journey through Tokyo and Peking " by Peter Quennell, and " The Use of Poetry " and " After Strange Gods " by T. S. Eliot ; Messrs. Grayson and Grayson and Mr. Wyndham Lewis for " The Apes of God " ; Messrs. Longmans, Green, and Co., Ltd., and Mr. Arthur Bryant for " The National Character " ; Messrs. Macmillan and Co., Ltd., and Mr. John Collier for " His Monkey Wife " ; Mr. Charles Morgan for " The Fountain " ; Messrs. Ivor Nicholson and Watson and Mr. Philip Lindsay for " King Henry V."

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	I
I. ROBERT GRAVES	
Claudius at the Games . . . . .	15
II. ERIC LINKLATER	
1. Rugby International . . . . .	25
2. Heyday at the Tarascon . . . . .	32
III. DAVID GARNETT	
1. Crash in Mongolia . . . . .	36
2. Eleventh Hour . . . . .	47
IV. R. C. HUTCHINSON	
The Penitence Chamber . . . . .	52
V. CHARLES MORGAN	
The Prisoners make a Tunnel . . . . .	66
VI. RICHARD CHURCH	
1. Turning a Sere Leaf . . . . .	78
2. New Self Awakening . . . . .	80
VII. F. C. BODEN	
1. Wet Day : Chesterfield . . . . .	94
2. Accident in the Mine . . . . .	98
VIII. ROGER DATALLER	
1. Water in the Mine . . . . .	104
2. Leaving the Mine . . . . .	113
3. A Mining Girlhood . . . . .	117
IX. HERBERT READ	
Boyhood on a Yorkshire Farm . . . . .	122

# CONTENTS

X. E. H. YOUNG	
A Mountain Hike . . . . .	136
XI. JOHN COLLIER	
Mr. Fatigay and the Chimp sail for Eng- land . . . . .	147
XII. WYNDHAM LEWIS	
The Toilette of a Gossip-Star . . . . .	163
XIII. PHILIP LINDSAY	
Agincourt . . . . .	173
XIV. ARTHUR BRYANT	
Women's Life : Yesterday and To-day . . . . .	191
XV. ADRIAN BELL	
The Country Life : Bee-keeping . . . . .	204
XVI. PETER QUENNELL	
1. The Country near Peking . . . . .	217
2. The Dancing of Kikugoro . . . . .	222
XVII. T. S. ELIOT	
1. Acquaintance with Poetry . . . . .	227
2. Hardy and Lawrence . . . . .	232
XVIII. BONAMY DOBRÉE	
The New Way of Writing . . . . .	238



## INTRODUCTION

### I. *Nineteen-Twenties and Nineteen-Thirties*

IN the field of literature the first decade after the War was one of bitterness and brutality, hectic enjoyment and despair; of dejection, strained elation, furious experiment, and cynical intellectualism. Not the Naughty Nineties: the Terrible Twenties. Among its high priests were D. H. Lawrence and Lytton Strachey; Mr. James Joyce, Mr. T. S. Eliot; Mr. I. A. Richards, the Sitwells, Mrs. Woolf, Mr. Noel Coward, and Mr. Aldous Huxley. But their spirit was too terrible—like the “terrible crystal” of the fore-runner Gerard Manley Hopkins—to be anything but temporary, and it died with D. H. Lawrence, its tormented symbol. The years were rich in virtuosity and poor in human sympathy: out of step.

In the Nineteen Thirties—the period represented in the present anthology—signs of a return to normality are apparent on all hands. Hatred of convention has ceased to be the prime passion, and sex has declined as the staple of news. Sentiment lies still under the shadow of suspicion, but it has no longer a monopoly of mockery. Unrest has lost some prestige as a virtue, and raw psychoanalysis as a method. They are (so far) the Tentative Thirties, reaching towards fresh stand-

ards. We have realized, in Mr. W. H. Auden's words, that

" If we really want to live  
We'd better try at once to try."

Amongst causes contributing to the restoration of order are the natural urge to escape from a state of unstable equilibrium, the keying up to action inspired by dictatorships abroad, and the accession of a generation not directly deflated by the War and desperately anxious to get something done. Our house is still shaking after the earthquake, but we no longer dread its really tumbling down. We have ceased to shriek for help; and try to keep cool and utilize the matter-of-fact. We are not idealists or super-optimists, but realists. And we speak in a level tone of voice, gibberings and vociferations over; not unlike what we hear from our loud-speaker. Our manner, after falling from the frying-pan of Tennyson into the fire of Mr. Joyce, has just begun to approach a serviceable temperature.

## 2. *Style*

No feature of the new decade is more noticeable than the avoidance of "style." The lessons taught by Mr. Herbert Read,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bonamy Dobrée, and others,<sup>2</sup> are being learnt. "Poetry is creative

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Read, *English Prose Style*, G. Bell, 1928. Read and Dobrée, *The London Book of English Prose*, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Mr. T. S. Eliot's practice and precept. Also Miss Vernon Lee, *The Handling of Words*, Lane, 1923; exposure of affected writing (Chapter VI.).

## INTRODUCTION

expression; Prose is constructive expression," wrote Mr. Read; and the essential prose quality of clear statement, conspicuous in Swift (elevated since the War to a kind of godhead), is now predominant. Deliberate devices and opalescences have lost caste. The Metaphysical influence, without falling into extinction, has sensibly declined. The essence of the new wit correspondingly has come to be not the most unexpectedly *recherché* (generally obscure scientific) term, but the deflation of the *recherché* or the consecrated by an audacious pinprick ("Vincent swallowed his lights" for "Vincent's heart was in his mouth").

In most of the passages included in this anthology the reader will find a tautness, a controlled factuality; no beglamourment, but the closest possible presentation, austere, left to create its own mood without the author's interference. And this reticence tells. For all the rejection of literary "effects" in the manner of Gibbon and Macaulay, the description of Agincourt (for example) is overwhelming. The facts do the work themselves. The impersonality draws the reader to the centre of the action. The omission of coloured detail reveals a self-control that holds the reader only the more willing victim. He is reduced, to his advantage, to exercise his own mind and imagination; to collaborate.

The net result is that whereas in the Nineteen-Twenties the author's mood and style were often the primary matters of interest, because extreme and unexpected, to-day the subject is the thing,

## MODERN PROSE

as it ought to be. Prose has gained a more *central* character, by a seeming neglect.

### 3. *The Story of English Prose Style*

The twin curses of style have been habit and an inferiority complex. Habit, because a custom good or bad once obtaining, nothing short of a revolution, covering half a century or more, has been able to dislodge it. Whole generations become "conditioned" right on into the time when the given conditioning is completely unsuited to the changed values. An inferiority complex, because once an author realizes his words are to be printed and permanently preserved he tends to lose the ease of speech, and strain after the high-falutin. "Naturalness" is generally his last achievement: the sign that the barrier between author and subject has fallen.

So it comes about that though English has been spoken for well over a thousand years, and written in a more or less modern form for nearly five hundred, yet good English prose suited to ordinary occasions and general subjects dates only from Queen Anne.<sup>1</sup> And a conversationally easy but subtle prose is just being invented. So powerful as resisters are formalism and ancient custom.

Briefly the story of style development is, that after good beginnings in narrative (fifteenth century), prose-writers turned to Latin models,

<sup>1</sup> See *English Literary Prose in the Making*, by Constance Bullock, Harp, 1928.

## INTRODUCTION

which, however good as a lesson in construction, led to a logical and ponderous artificiality. But at least English proved to have strength. Meantime schools arose to practise another kind of artifice, that of colour and music: the Inkhorne writers, the Euphuists, the Metaphysicals—in the Elizabethan and following periods. English proved sweet on the tongue, and capable of creating atmosphere.

Then with the Royal Society and the French influence of the Restoration came the great hour of Dryden, and the achievement of a Middle Style, well made yet familiar and adaptable to any general topic. Addison and Steele further perfected and eased this instrument.

For two centuries little essentially new appeared. There were many great prose-writers employing diverse styles, patterned variously on the older models, lofty in a Burke or Ruskin, plain in a Jefferies or Samuel Butler; few who, like Sterne or Henry James, were preparing the way for the *interior* style of to-day.

The present century began with much sentimental mushiness of fine writing among the minors, but the important influences were the efficient impersonality of Bennett and Wells, the stripped muscularity of Shaw, and the paradoxical wit of Chesterton and Belloc. Their influence—largely Augustan—was salutary. Already W. H. Hudson and George Moore, however, were achieving interior fluidity, brook-like or Biblical.

After the War, style, like everything else, went into the melting-pot. All the historical experiments were renewed. Mr. Aldous Huxley and

## MODERN PROSE

Mr. Wyndham Lewis, with an array of scientific technical terms, modernized the Inkhorne style. The Sitwells, with a parade of baroque, revived Euphuism. Many toyed with the musical cadences and the conceits of the Metaphysicals—and still do, like Mr. George Barker (in *Janus*, 1935), "The notes of a zithern plucked by a radiant peacock reach my ears—no, it is the music of seven waterfalls whose streams, like marble roofing, cross in their fall—or a magnolia striking notes from the eyes of Orpheus." J. M. Robertson and Mr. H. J. Massingham, with a heavy sententious tread, returned to a Latinized model. But the Middle Style still kept its place for general use.

The characteristic experiment was that of the stream of consciousness. The translation of incipient thoughts and feelings, discontinuous, related only by half-accidental personal associations, found favour with those who felt that logical statement had nothing more to yield. They went on to invent a new notation for the raw thoughts and sensations themselves, to exhibit hitherto unguessed at mental and emotional tensions. *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Waste Land* (1925) showed that in this abnormal field there was something definite to be achieved.

Related to, and largely successive to, this specialist invention was the development of the freer "interior" style, already spoken of, for everyday purposes.

## INTRODUCTION

### 4. *Style in the Thirties*

Changes used to take anything up to centuries in their stride. In the modern world they take only decades. Already the perturbations of the Twenties are dated; the revivals, experiments, revolts. We are in the period of the Interior Middle Style.

The Middle Style is suited to us to-day, because in a world of science and common sense we tend to fight shy of emotion and imagination. But our world is one also of conscious mental attitudes and speed of thought, so our Middle must have the plasticity of the inner self. Not for us the style suited to the formal thoughts of eighteenth-century gentlemen in a coffee-house, but to the half-seized apprehensions of impressionable modern men in a whirl of traffic and wireless telegraphy. The new style is one of subconscious ease, still more informal than Addison's, and more pliant; tolerant of verbless sentences, colloquial contractions, economized punctuation (such as single quotation marks and omitted commas), in fact any kind of rule-breaking if only the wanted effect is gained—which is the unobtrusive notation of quick thought. This Interior Middle Style frowns on the labouring of the obvious and the logical, on anything rhetorical. It tolerates, even encourages, the ambiguous. It prefers to translate the essence of a meaning rather than the detail of it (like a good deal of modern art and sculpture). Because we want nothing to stand between us and the flow of ideas: least of all flourishes and figures. The Twenties experi-

## MODERN PROSE

menters, who so often landed themselves in the slough of gibberish, honourably led the way for others to find the solid path of an intelligible speech for our time ; not one of luxury, scholarship, atmosphere, urbanity, efficiency, but " mentality," of " the interior monologue."

Contrast, for example, these two passages from Mr. Eric Linklater's *Poet's Pub*, 1929. The first is Twenties in manner ; modern Inkhorne employed for the purpose of humorous fantasy :

The life of a sparking-plug is a fierce tropical existence of days only. No healing leucocytes rush to the aid of a cracked cylinder, nor anastomosing tributaries expand to carry the life-blood of a choked feed-pipe. Old motor-cars grow asthmatic, systolic murmurs betray their weakened power, and carbon comes to poison them outright. And so the aged Morris staggered in its gait like an old lady in the rain, wheezing a little, anxious about her umbrella which the wind was bullying. It grew somewhat hysterical, feeling itself far from home, and began to run in an agitated manner, short bursts of speed striving to make up for more frequent laggarding. . . . Light showed ahead.

A scientific system of reference replaces the classical, but essentially this is the Elizabethan pedantic fury for words, set off by a freakish fancy ; and, though amusing, worthless as a contribution towards a tradition. The second is in the Thirties manner, as conversationally informal as Mr. Linklater's virtuosity allows :

None of them thought about Mr. Wesson, who had been awake for several hours. Even more than the defeat of all his schemes did his present confinement irk him, for like most Americans he was accustomed to rising at 'an hour when all but the most un-



## INTRODUCTION

fortunate classes in England are still comfortably asleep. And so he walked up and down his room in a very bad temper. He could not walk far, for the turret room was small. And he had no clothes to put on. Nor a razor. Nor a toothbrush. Nothing indeed but very old pyjamas and a magnificent view from his lofty window. But for the present he was not interested in scenery. He wanted to get dressed.

Here speed is the chief thing, following the train of Mr. Wesson's thoughts; then variety of sentence, deftness of turn, and plainness of diction. Syntax is stripped to bare essentials, and the reader has nothing to delay him as he eagerly follows the crisp wording. There are many full stops but few real pauses. It is all an urgent unity. And such a manner may well last.

On the whole the extracts in this book exhibit this plainness. It is best seen in the work of Mr. David Garnett, masculine, alertly straight, with no slackness, affectation, or display anywhere. It is black and white. It is like a modern glass and steel lounge, not a Victorian drawing-room.

### 5. *Outlook*

The spirit of reconciliation, after a harsh exile, reappears in many of the extracts in this book; in none more explicitly than that of Mr. Richard Church. Here we have an incident from a story that might have been bitter, portraying characters who might have come from somewhere in Mr. Huxley and left little but a bad taste in the mouth. The central character, an Englishman who has taken the post of secretary to an American

## MODERN PROSE

millionaire in Paris, presents at first a sorry sight. He is doubly embittered, by the War and by an unhappy marriage. In Paris he finds himself amidst a group of people isolated from the common absorption of family life, and loose, or hysterical, or cranks. He has an introverted, difficult temper, and might well make shipwreck. One fancies that Mr. Church toyed with the idea of such a shipwreck, and would a few years ago have made it, as the inevitable. Even the present novel takes long before straightening out to a harmonious solution. But such a solution, foreshadowed in the given extract, occurs. The love of a sensitive Frenchman and of his sister provides the reconciling motive ; and Gregory Wade opens his arms to life again. It is delicately done ; and it carries conviction in its unforced exactingness.

Similarly in Mr. Morgan and Mr. R. C. Hutchinson there is everywhere austere present this reconciling spirit, operating through love, an inner intellectualized spirituality, or self-abnegation. The reader is strangely moved by the purity of motive allied with acceptance of the whole of life. It is not a spirit of escape but attempted adaptation that preserves the integrity of the mind. There is courage in it, and frank humour, and faith in ultimate standards. Though implicit only, and undogmatic, it is as real as the explicit doctrine of a Catholic critic like Mr. Eric Gill.

The historians are positive, unashamed of their patriotism, quietly glowing with their task ; yet, plainly seen in Mr. Bryant, not shrinking from self-examination. The nature writers are warm, without sentimentalizing. They avoid set pictures

## INTRODUCTION

and rhapsody, and tend to look on nature as a habitable background that promotes the humanity of its dwellers, giving them a certain tang of character. There is little attempt to create real or artificial atmosphere ; but there is no insistence on " Nature red in tooth and claw." Rather, as in Mr. Read's telling of his boyhood on a farm, there is the "innocent" but not ignorant or falsely idealizing "eye."

On the other side of the picture will seem to be the gibes of Mr. Lewis, Mr. Graves, and Mr. Collier. But their satire, barbed and bitter, rises free of the morbidity of D. H. Lawrence and the Powys brothers. They ask for candour and humanity, not the moon. Mr. Collier's Mr. Fatigay is as lovable, in fact, as Dr. Primrose or Mr. Pickwick ; and though it is the monkey who is humane, and not Miss Amy Flint, we feel as we read the impish satire that it is only Mr. Collier's fun, and Emily is human after all, "into monkey."

Taking the writers all in all, admittedly there is no roaring ranting positiveness, publishing itself from the housetops ; all the same, a steadily increasing release is evident from repression, for life's forces to find employment again in service. A masculine confidence dwells again in the land.

### *6. The Present Team*

This is limited by exigencies of space to eighteen writers.

Some, like Mr. Graves, Mr. Eliot, Mr. Read, Mr. Quennell, and Mr. Church, had made an earlier

## MODERN PROSE

reputation as poets. But none go in for fine writing. The familiar note predominates. In Mr. Garnett it is of a reticent kind befitting occasions of exceptional fortitude. In Mr. Graves it is tough, in keeping with the brutality of the Roman decline. Austerity rules in Mr. Read, and a fine suppleness in Mr. Dataller gently veiling his farewell to the colliery. Recounting mining accidents, Mr. Dataller and Mr. Boden are sturdy; though the latter heats up to a species of Lawrentian improvisation in portraying Chesterfield on a wet day. Mr. Morgan and Mr. Hutchinson have in common an incisive practicality of tone that with an inward force begets an extraordinary vividness, whether on the attempted escape of British prisoners of war from a neutral country, or on that of a German boy from a monastery cell.

Miss E. H. Young has a level tone, and firmness; like a grey, hard road going steadily on and on to an unhurried horizon. Her style suggests some of the effort the climbers felt, but without strain.

Mr. Church and Mr. Quennell show an especial sensuous sensitiveness, a distinction that renders people, settings, and movement with beauty. The latter has a cameo-like fineness and brightness, precision and a coloured grace; the former a luminous quality, thin and delicate, crape paper sounding, "His vision became less tangible, until at last he turned with a sigh of perplexity from the thin streak of vapourish grey."

Mr. Linklater has read the Elizabethans, and become drunk with their lavishness. But he wears his sceptre and purple like a bauble and

## INTRODUCTION

suit of motley. He goes in for a rotund, encyclopædic density that includes classical allusion and scientific fun. He delights in hyperbole and epigram, his Rugby a game "that all the gods of Greece might crowd the northern skies to see," and yet "a witless wrangle punctuated by a fretful whistle." His sublime is one with his ridiculous; and he has not thrown off the Twenties yet. (But one should read, to be fair, his grimly plain *Men of Ness*, 1932.)

Mr. Collier is all rollicking banter, robustly clear and fluent, while Mr. Wyndham Lewis, jagged and obscure, savagely torments his legendarily exaggerated metal puppets. Mr. Lewis is certainly not familiar, but his Inkhorne mock-pedantry has an astringent violence that lies nearer to plain than to fine writing: with him the lowlands and the highlands of diction come with a mighty shock together. He is his own school.

Mr. Lindsay writes in the chronicle manner, rejecting display, close, steady, cumulative instead of cross-sectional. Mr. Bryant has a simple, persuasive warmth, based on unemphatic antithesis and homeliness of phrase. His is a spoken middle style, with Bible touches.

Mr. Bell produces the full, tranquil music of a humane soul at peace with earth and life; ample, friendly, more coloured than the fashion to-day, expressing an old-world mood of innocent recollection. He likes a rapid, undulating, triple rhythm,—“bees are the gift of the air coming to hang like a monstrous fruit under the blossoms of May.”

We come to the critics. Mr. T. S. Eliot is

## MODERN PROSE

sophisticated, sober, exact, well-bred. The artist and the scholar meet to perfection in him. He is a modern, meditative version of Dryden ; Dryden without his bludgeon. His prose, in its plea for a return to orthodoxy, has the order and proportion of a *locus classicus*. Our other critic, Mr. Dobrée, defines the modern style as a "transparent medium": which is precisely a description of his own. He is level-toned, moderate, a cultivated man talking to himself.

This is the team: its accent normal. The Twenties raree-show is over.

# I

ROBERT GRAVES

## Claudius at the Games

[From a novel presenting, supposedly through the eyes of the youthful Claudius—later, 41 A.D., to become Emperor—the corruption of Roman society. The half-crippled Claudius, though good-hearted and lovable, is non-resisting; and his reactions to the brutality and vice around him convey the strongest impression of their horror.]

It was the first sword-fight I had been permitted to attend, and to find myself in the President's Box was all the more embarrassing for me on this account. Germanicus did all the work, though pretending to consult me when a decision had to be made, and carried it through with great assurance and dignity. It was my luck that this fight was the best that had ever been exhibited at the amphitheatre. As it was my first, however, I could not appreciate its excellence, having no background of previous displays to use for purposes of comparison. But certainly I have never seen a better since, and I must have seen nearly a thousand important ones. Livia wanted Germanicus to gain popularity as his father's son, and had spared no expense in hiring the best performers in Rome to fight, all out. Usually professional sword-fighters were very careful about hurting themselves and each other, and spent

## MODERN PROSE

most of their energy on feints and parries and blows which looked and sounded Homeric, but which were really quite harmless, like the thwacks that slaves give each other with stage-clubs in low comedy. It was only occasionally, when they lost their temper with each other or had an old score to settle, that they were worth watching. This time Livia had got the heads of the Gladiatorial Guild together, and told them that she wanted her money's worth. Unless every bout was a real one she would have the guild broken up: there had been too many managed fights in the previous summer. So the fighters were warned by the guild-masters that this time they were not to play kiss-in-the-ring or they would be dismissed from the guild.

In the first six combats one man was killed, one so seriously wounded that he died the same day, and a third had his shield-arm lopped off close to the shoulder, which caused roars of laughter. In each of the other three combats one of the men disarmed the other, but not before he had given such a good account of himself that Germanicus and I, when appealed to, were able to confirm the approval of the audience by raising our thumbs in token that his life should be spared. One of the victors had been a very rich knight a year or two before. In all these combats the rule was that the antagonists should not fight with the same sort of weapon. It was sword against spear, or sword against battle-axe, or spear against mace. The seventh combat was between a man armed with a regulation army sword and an old-fashioned round brass-bound shield and a man armed with a three-pronged trout-spear and a



## CLAUDIUS AT THE GAMES

short net. The sword-man, or "chaser," was a soldier of the Guards who had recently been condemned to death for getting drunk and striking his captain. His sentence had been commuted to a fight against this net and trident man—a professional from Thessaly, very highly paid, who had killed more than twenty opponents in the previous five years, so Germanicus told me.

My sympathies were with the soldier, who came into the arena looking very white and shaky—he had been in prison for some days and the strong light bothered him. But his entire company, who it appears sympathized very much with him, for the captain was a bully and a beast, shouted in unison for him to pull himself together and defend the company's honour. He straightened up and shouted, "I'll do my best, lads!" His camp nickname, as it happened, was "Roach," and this was enough to put the greater part of the audience on his side, though the Guards were pretty unpopular in the city. If a roach were to kill a fisherman that would be a good joke. To have the amphitheatre on one's side is half the battle to a man fighting for his life. The Thes-salian, a wiry, long-armed, long-legged fellow, came swaggering in close behind him, dressed only in a leather tunic and a hard round leather cap. He was in a good humour, cracking jokes with the front benches, for his opponent was an amateur, and Livia was paying him a thousand gold pieces for the afternoon, and five hundred more if he killed his man in a good fight. They came together in front of the Box and saluted first Augustus and Livia, and then Germanicus and me as joint-presidents, with the usual for-

mula: "Greetings, Sirs. We salute you in Death's shadow!" We returned the greetings with a formal gesture, but Germanicus said to Augustus, "Why, sir, that chaser's one of my father's veterans. I know him well. He won a crown in Germany for being the first man over an enemy stockade." Augustus was interested. "Good," he said, "this should be a good fight, then. But in that case the net-man must be ten years younger, and years count in this game." Then Germanicus signalled for the trumpets to sound, and the fight began.

Roach stood his ground, while the Thessalian danced around him. Roach was not such a fool as to waste his strength running after his lightly armed opponent or yet to be paralysed into immobility. The Thessalian tried to make him lose his temper by taunting him, but Roach was not to be drawn. Only once when the Thessalian came almost within lunging distance did he show any readiness to take the offensive, and the quickness of his thrust drew a roar of delight from the benches. But the Thessalian was away in time. Soon the fight grew more lively; the Thessalian made stabs, high and low, with his long trident, which Roach parried easily, but with one eye on the net, weighted with small lead pellets, which the Thessalian managed with his left hand.

"Beautiful work!" I heard Livia say to Augustus. "The best net-man in Rome. He's playing with the soldier. Did you see that? He could have entangled him and got his stroke in then if he had wished. But he's spinning out the fight."

## CLAUDIUS AT THE GAMES

"Yes," said Augustus. "I'm afraid the soldier is done for. He should have kept off drink."

Augustus had hardly spoken when Roach knocked up the trident and jumped forward, ripping the Thessalian's leather tunic between arm and body. The Thessalian was away in a flash, and as he ran he swung the net across Roach's face. By ill-luck a pellet struck Roach in the eye, momentarily blinding him. He checked his pace, and the Thessalian, seeing his advantage, turned and knocked the sword spinning out of his hand. Roach sprang to retrieve it, but the Thessalian got there first, ran with it to the barrier and tossed it across to a rich patron sitting in the front rank of the seats reserved for the knights. Then he returned to the pleasant task of goading and dispatching an unarmed man. The net whistled round Roach's head and the trident jabbed here and there; but Roach was still undismayed, and once made a snatch at the trident and nearly got possession of it. The Thessalian had now worked him towards our Box to make a spectacular killing.

"That's enough!" said Livia in a matter-of-fact voice, "he's done enough playing about. He ought to finish him now." The Thessalian needed no prompting. He made a simultaneous sweep of his net around Roach's head and a stab at his belly with the trident. And then what a roar went up! Roach had caught the net with his right hand, and flinging his body back, kicked with all his strength at the shaft of the trident, a foot or two from his enemy's hand. The weapon flew up over the Thessalian's head, turned

## MODERN PROSE

in the air and stuck quivering into the wooden barrier. The Thessalian stood astonished for a moment, then left the net in Roach's hands and dashed past him to recover the trident. Roach threw himself forward and sideways and caught him in the ribs, as he ran, with the spiked boss of his shield. The Thessalian fell, gasping, on all fours. Roach recovered himself quickly, and with a sharp downward swing of the shield caught him on the back of his neck.

"The rabbit-blow!" said Augustus. "I've never seen that done in an arena before, have you, my dear Livia? Eh? Killed him, too, I swear."

The Thessalian was dead. I expected Livia to be greatly displeased, but all she said was, "And served him right. That's what comes of under-rating one's opponent. I'm disappointed in that net-man. Still, it has saved me that five hundred in gold, so I can't complain, I suppose."

To crown the afternoon's enjoyment there was a fight between two German hostages who happened to belong to rival clans, and had voluntarily engaged each other to a death-duel. It was not pretty fighting, but a savage hacking with long sword and halberd; each wore a small highly ornamented shield strapped on the left forearm. This was an unusual manner of fighting, for the ordinary German soldier does all his work with the slim-shafted, narrow-headed assegai; the broad-headed halberd and the long sword are marks of rank. One of the combatants, a yellow-headed man over six feet tall, made short work of the other, cutting him about terribly before he gave him his final slashing blow on the side of

## CLAUDIUS AT THE GAMES

the neck. The crowd gave him a great cheer, which went to his head, for he made a speech in a mixture of German and camp-Latin, saying that he was a renowned warrior in his country and had killed six Romans in battle, including an officer, before he had been given up as a hostage by his jealous uncle, the tribal chief. He now challenged any Roman of rank to meet him, sword to sword, and make the lucky seventh for him.

The first champion who sprang into the ring was a young staff-officer of an old but impoverished family, called Cassius Chærea. He came running to the Box for permission to take up the challenge. His father, he said, had been killed in Germany under that glorious general in whose memory this display was being held; might he piously sacrifice this boastful fellow to his father's ghost? Cassius was a fine fencer. I had often watched him on Mars Field. Germanicus consulted with Augustus and then with me; when Augustus gave his consent, and I mumbled mine, Cassius was told to arm himself. He went to the dressing-rooms and borrowed Roach's sword, shield, and body armour, for good luck and out of compliment to Roach.

Soon there began a far grander fight than any that the professionals had shown, the German swinging his great sword and Cassius parrying with his shield and always trying to get in under the German's guard—but the fellow was as agile as he was strong, and twice beat Cassius to his knees. The crowd was perfectly silent, as if it were a religious performance they were watching, and nothing was heard but the clash of steel and

the rattle of shields. Augustus said, "The German's too strong for him, I'm afraid. We shouldn't have permitted this. If Cassius gets killed it will create a bad impression on the frontier when the news gets there."

Then Cassius's foot slipped in a blood pool and he fell over on his back. The German straddled over him with a triumphant smile on his face, and then . . . and then there was a roaring in my ears and a blackness before my eyes, and I fainted away. The emotion of seeing men killed for the first time in my life, and then the combat between Roach and the Thessalian, in which I felt so strongly for Roach, and now this fight in which it seemed that it was I myself who was desperately battling for life with the German—it was too much for me. So I did not witness Cassius's wonderful recovery as the German lifted that ugly sword to crash in his skull, the quick upward thrust with the shield-boss at the German's loins, the sideways roll, and the quick decisive stab under the arm-pit. Yes, Cassius killed his man all right. As for me, nobody noticed that I had fainted for some time, and when they did I was already coming to. They propped me up in my place again until the show had formally ended. To have been carried out would have been a disgrace for every one.

The next day the Games continued, but I was not there. It was announced that I was ill. I missed one of the most spectacular contests ever witnessed in the amphitheatre, between an Indian elephant—they are much bigger than the African breed—and a rhinoceros. Experts betted on the rhinoceros, for although it was by far the smaller

## CLAUDIUS AT THE GAMES

animal its hide was much thicker than the elephant's, and it was expected to make short work of the elephant with its long sharp horn. In Africa, they were saying, elephants had learned to avoid the haunts of the rhinoceros, which holds undisputed sway in its own territory. This Indian elephant, however—as Postumus described the fight to me afterwards—showed no anxiety or fear when the rhinoceros came charging into the arena, meeting him each time with his tusks and lumbering after him with clumsy speed when he retired discomfited. But finding himself unable to penetrate the thick armour of the beast's neck as he charged, this fantastic creature had recourse to cunning. He picked up with his trunk a rough broom made of a thorn bush which a sweeper had left on the sand, and darted it in his enemy's face the next time he charged: he succeeded in blinding first one eye then the other. The rhinoceros, distracted with rage and pain, dashed here and there in pursuit of the elephant, and finally ran full tilt against the wooden barrier, going right through it and shattering his horn and stunning himself on the marble barrier behind. Then up came the elephant with his mouth open as if he were laughing, and first enlarging the breach in the wooden barrier, began trampling on his fallen enemy's skull, which he crushed in. He then nodded his head as if in time to music and presently walked quietly away. His Indian driver came running out with a huge bowl of sweetmeats, which the elephant poured into his mouth while the audience roared applause. Then the beast helped the driver up on his neck, offering his trunk as a ladder, and

## MODERN PROSE

trotted over to Augustus, where he trumpeted the royal salute—which these elephants are taught only to utter for monarchs—and knelt in homage. But, as I say, I missed this performance.

*I, Claudius.* 1934.



## II

### ERIC LINKLATER

#### I. Rugby International

[From a novel dealing with a young Orkney islander, Magnus Merriman, who fights a Lowlands parliamentary election as a Scottish Nationalist candidate. There are vivid satirical sketches of intellectual Bohemianism in Edinburgh. Later Magnus exchanges his hothouse life for that of a farmer on his native island, where he finds his real happiness.]

It is customary to praise the appearance of Edinburgh, and a custom that has more excuse than some, for in certain aspects the city has indeed a noble countenance, and by some trick of light or situation an illusion of supplementary grandeur, a sublime superfœtation, is not seldom added to that which already possesses a dignity and beauty of its own. | The precipitous small hills that rise about Arthur's Seat, for example, often appear to be of mountainous size, and seem to fill the sky with shadowy vastness, so that one thinks of Asian peaks, and a panorama of the world's high tablelands—plastered as if by glaciers with the shining names of Kanchenjunga and Demavend, of Aconcagua and Kilimanjaro—unrolls in the confusion of one's mind. Then from the Castle that slow declivity, criss-crossed with mild grey streets, to the veiled lustre of the Forth and the pale gold lands beyond, may under

certain skies be revealed in such kindliness that urbanity puts on a pastoral light, and one can almost hear the bleating of sheep, and yet be not moved to cry *Absit omen*. Or, from the Craigs, where the smoke of a thousand chimneys blows like a banner, or flaunts itself like a blue forest, or dances like snakes, or grows like dim tide-waving seaweed to an upper calm, then the roofs below might be the houses in a town that Hans Andersen built, and witches live there, and broomsticks have a moonward bent, and children go hand-in-hand by the signpost of the Three Wishes to fantastic adventure. And stranger than all else, more haunted by the beauty of the air, is the Castle, that now looks straight of side, severe as a child's castle cut in cardboard, and now recedes from the eye and is draped with mist, so that walls grow beyond walls and the battlements are endless, and a watch-tower, out-thrust, impends not only on the plain beneath, but on Time's abyss and caverns of the past. It is a castle of moods, now merely antiquated, now impregnable, now the work of giants and now of dreams; a fairy castle, a haunted castle, a castle in Spain, a castle you may enter with a twopenny guide book in your hand; it has heard the cry of Flodden, the travail of queens, the iron scuffle of armour, and, no more than a handful of years ago, the roaring of forty Australians, seven feet high and drunk enough to rip the stars from heaven, penned in its guardroom; it is Scotland's castle, Queen Mary's castle, and the castle of fifty thousand annual visitors who walk through it with rain on their boots and bewilderment in their hearts. To be final—and, finally, to

be brief—it is a good castle, and the people who walk Princes Street below are, as Magnus discovered, not always of a mien that deserves so dignified a neighbour.

But once in alternate years there is a Saturday morning when Edinburgh is filled with men and women who truly may call the Castle their own and in their bearing not shame its ancient walls. It is not devotion to the gods that calls them in, not some blazing heyday of the Trinity that brings them to worship, nor the inception of a crusade, nor memory, like a phoenix feathered and flowered again, of elder glory that comes in every second year to proper ripeness for a festival. It is not to worship they come, nor to exalt themselves, nor in tears of humility to taste the saltiness of the earth, but, very sensibly, to be entertained. And the source of their entertainment is a football match between Scotland and England.

On the morning of that day, in bright blustery March weather, Princes Street is full of tall men from the Borders, brave men from the North, and burly men from the West who have made their names famous in school or university, in county and burgh, for prowess in athletic games. It is not footballers only who come, for on this day all other games do homage to Rugby, and admit its headship over them, so that cricketers and tennis players, players of hockey and racquets and fives and golf, boxing men and rowing men and swimmers and cross-country runners, putters of the weight and throwers of the hammer, hurdlers, high and low jumpers, pole vaulters and runners on skis, as well as mountaineers and men who shoot grouse and stalk the red stag and fish

for salmon—all these come to see Scotland's team match brawn and wit against the wit and brawn of England. To see them walking in clear spring weather is almost as exhilarating as the game itself, for their shoulders are straight, they are tall and lithe, they are square and strong, their eyes are bright, and their skin is toughened and tanned by the weather.

But not the men only walk proudly, for the women with them are also swimmers and hockey players, golfers and moorland striders, and they are often as tall as the men, and their complexions are lovelier and their bearing is free. Here is Diana, here is Atalanta, there, with gay scarf and a blackcock's feather in her cap, goes Hippolyte with a troop of Amazons—God be praised, not mutilated for the bow but supple and whole for the more lenient brassy—and there is one who, wrestling with Spartan youths, might bring to earth twelve at a time. It is no muslin prettiness that walks here with the fleet-limbed barrel-chested youth of Scotland, but strong loveliness that can face the wind and keep its colour in the rain. They would not allure the delicate mind, the feeble-luxurious mind, the petty sensual mind that desires soft flesh, provocative warmth, and the titter of prurience; they would frighten the epicene, the pallid tribe of catamites and ingles and lipping nancies; but raiding Vikings would roar with joy and straightway seize them and carry them, scratching like tigers, to their ships.

Now in the morning this crowd goes to and fro on Princes Street, but in the early afternoon it heads westward, all one way, to the football ground. And on this particular afternoon it was

## RUGBY INTERNATIONAL

joined by a second crowd, different in appearance, manner, and speech, that was also bent on seeing a football match. But this match was another kind of football, played by professional players, and the spectators hurrying to it, though far more excited and livelier in their conversation than those who were going to the international game, had not the athletic look of the latter. They were another order, socially inferior to the devotees of Rugby, and they had not been seen on Princes Street in the morning sunlight because they had been at work. To look at them it seemed obvious that work was a perversion, for it had not given them the upright bearing and the swinging stride that play had bestowed on the others, but rather it had kept their faces pale, and though it had toughened them it had not given them grace. But also it seemed that they had a larger gift of enthusiasm, for already they were hotly arguing about the prospects of the game—the Rugby people discussed their afternoon's entertainment in tones of calmness and with easy comment—though the professional match had not the spur of international rivalry, but was merely a competition between two Edinburgh clubs known as the Hibernians and the Heart of Midlothian.

There is a kind of Rugby that is no more than dull squabbling in the mud, a drenched and witless wrangling punctuated by a fretful whistle. But, at its best, Rugby is a game that all the gods of Greece might crowd the northern skies to see, and, benched on our cold clouds, be not restrained either by frozen bottoms or the crowd's chill

## MODERN PROSE

sceptic hearts from plunging to the aid of stronger Myrmidons, of plucking from the scrimmage some Hector trodden in the mire and nursing him to strength again. Well might the Thunderer send fleet Mercury, swooping from the heights, to pick from the empty air Achilles' mis-flung pass and with it race—dog-rose and buttercup fast springing in his track—to the eternal goal.

And that square Ajax—dirtier than his namesake and more brave—would Hera not guard his brow from flying boots as, dauntless, down he hurls himself to stop a forward rush? Is there in all that crowd a Helen not quick-breathing, tiptoed and ready to leave dull Menelaus in his office chair and flee with Paris there, who runs so lightning-swift on the left wing?—on the left wing only? Eagles would need two to fly so fast.

Rugby can be a game for gods to see and poets to describe, and such a match was this. *L'audace, encore l'audace, et toujours l'audace* was both sides' motto, and which was more gallant—England, taller and bulkier-seeming because clad in white; Scotland, running like stags and tackling like thunderbolts in blue—no one can truthfully say and none would care to know. If Tallent for England was magnificent, Simmers for Scotland was superb. Did Tallent run the whole length of the field and score? Then Simmers, leaping like a leopard, snatched from the air a high cross-kick of Macpherson's and scored from that. Did Black for England kick like a giant, long, true, and hard? Then see what Logan at the scrum, Smith on the wing, did like giants for Scotland. And each side in turn, tire-

## RUGBY INTERNATIONAL

less and full of devil, came to the attack and ranged the field to score. Pace never slackened from start to finish, and every minute thrilled with excitement till, at the end, wisps of fog came down—perhaps the gods indeed, hiding their brightness in the mist—and in that haze the players still battled with unwearied zeal.

Judge, then, of the fervour of the crowd, poised as it were on the broad rim of a saucer, and as thick together as if the saucer had been smeared with treacle and black sand thrown on it. But they were more mobile than sand, and ever and again a movement would pass through them as when a wave of the wind goes through a cornfield. Ever and again, as when walls in an earthquake fall asunder, some twelve or fourteen thousand would shiver and drift away from their neighbouring twelve thousand, and then, stability reasserted, fall slowly into place again. And now, like a monstrous and unheralded flowering of dark tulip-beds, the crowd would open to its heart and fling aloft, as countless petals, hats, sticks, and arms, and pretty handkerchiefs, and threaten to burst the sky with cheers. Now they were wild as their poorer neighbours who, some mile or two away, were cheering their paid teams with coarser tongues. Now all Scotland was at one, united in its heat, and only the most sour of moralists would decry that heat because it had been lighted by a trivial game.

Magnus carried his excitement with him, through the voluminous outpouring of the crowd, all the way to Francis Meiklejohn's flat, and Frieda, walking beside him, was as fervid as he, and willing even to admit that Rugby such as

this transcended the staccato violence of American football. But Meiklejohn, who had not been to the match, was sceptical of its virtues and scoffed at their enthusiasm. Mrs. Dolphin, who entered the room with them to hear the news, rejoiced to learn that Scotland had won, but was disinclined to believe that such a game was worthy to show off her country's virility.

"Was there any blood?" she asked, and on being told that injuries had been few, said, "It's shinty they should have been playing. I remember seeing a game of shinty at Kingussie, and half the men there had bloody heads before it was over. Every other crack of the ball there was a man carried off the field, for if it wasn't the ball that hit him it was the stick, and a shinty-stick is a fine weapon. There was a man called Alistair Mhor, and he stopped at one time and said, 'What's this on my stick?' And then he saw it was a man's eyebrow he had knocked off. Alistair was a Macdonald, and the man who had lost his eyebrow was a Campbell, so Alistair wasn't as sorry as he would have been otherwise. Oh, shinty's a fine game if you don't mind it being a little bit rough. It pleased them well enough in Kingussie, for the people there said they hadn't had such a treat for years."

## 2. Heyday at the Tarascon

Though Meiklejohn was not sympathetic with his guests' enthusiasm, his zeal for hospitality was unimpaired. Several other people arrived, and presently the room was full of the familiar



## AT THE TARASCON

sounds of *Figaro*, glass and bottle music, loud conversation, and Meiklejohn's detonating laughter. Among the new-comers was a very pretty girl whom Meiklejohn greeted with a flourish of welcome and introduced as Miss Beaully. He gathered her and Magnus and Frieda into a corner and said, "We're dining at the Tarascon to-night. I've got a table for four. Now I don't want any argument or hard-luck stories of previous engagements. We're going—so there's no more to be said."

Magnus alone, however, found no difficulty in tacit agreement. Miss Beaully said a great deal about the difficulty of getting dressed in time and the breaking of earlier promises that would be incidental to the acceptance of this new invitation, and made a fine show of reluctance before consenting to join them. Frieda was anxious to go, but was doubtful of her aunt's compliance, and would not say yes until she had telephoned to Mrs. Wishart for permission. After that the party continued with such agreeable hilarity as to put them in danger of forgetting the subsequent engagement, and indeed they did not remember it till so late an hour that neither Miss Beaully nor any one else had time to go home and change into evening dress. But fortified by Meiklejohn's vodka they then found themselves ready to flaunt the conventions and dare the invasion of Edinburgh's most distinguished restaurant in the permeable armour of ordinary clothes.

The Tarascon Restaurant was in the Albyn Hotel. It gave facilities for dancing and dining at approximately the same price: one could rise

from one's turbot *maitre d'hôtel*, that is, and while forgetting its flavour in the polite amusement of a waltz, find diversion—if such were one's nature—in the thought that all around one were agitated couples whose ears were full of music and whose stomachs were full of newly ingurgitated fragments of cutlet, potato salad, partridge, and rum soufflé. In a mechanical age the mechanism of the human body is of universal interest, and the spectacle of mortality overcoming so many difficulties at once was enthralling: here was a brain zealously receiving afferent impulse from the American orchestration of an African melody, analysing it, and transmitting a hundred instructions to all the muscles from trouser-top to toe; and there were the muscles, huge fellows like the quadriceps extensor and tiny pink slips like the flexor digiti quinti—or some such thing—co-ordinating these instructions and obeying them with more than the discipline of a Guards' battalion. And immediately above the trouser-line was a digestive system revolving the mixed bag of an eight-course dinner, sorting its contents with the care of a stamp collector before a tray of new specimens, telegraphing to the brain for hepatic aid and pancreatic reinforcements, and notifying its descending tracts of their imminent burden. Meanwhile the lungs were filtering oxygen from a bewildering indraught of cigarette smoke, perfume, and the odours of food; the ever-versatile brain was putting a score of facial and glottal muscles through their drill of social conversation, and still navigating its owner round the crowded fairway of the floor; and a host of tactile sensations were informing various parts of

## AT THE TARASCON

the body that of all God's creatures there were only two kinds, and male and female created He them. Nor does this catalogue comprise more than half the activities of these dancers—whom many people would foolishly call idle—but of other physiological business and cortical traffic there is no need to speak, for enough has been said to account for the popularity of the Tarascon Restaurant in those classes of people that could afford to frequent it.

On this particular evening it was full as a hive in the honey months, and as busy, with people who had been to the football match and were unwilling to stay quietly at home after that excitement. As though disgorged by the teeming dance-and-dining room, tables lined the foyer and corridor outside, whose occupants might hear the muted music from within, and people were still coming and going on the stairs, greeting friends and blocking the way with fortuitous assembly. The table that Meiklejohn had reserved was in the restaurant itself. It cowered beneath the orchestra and was overshadowed, almost overgrown, by surrounding diners like a Mayan temple in the jungle.

*Magnus Merriman. 1934.*

### III

## DAVID GARNETT

### I. Crash in Mongolia

[Extracts from novels handling, first, an air journey from England to Asia, when the hero, Wreaks, is forced down in the desert, and second, the story of the Red Indian Princess Pocahontas and John Smith, leader of the English colonists.]

HE climbed out, and after unscrewing one of the undercarriage struts to serve as a staff to support himself, he hobbled across the bed of the water-course, or *wady*, as he called it, from his experience of Arabia. The ground was thickly strewn with round pebbles and cobblestones, interspersed with a few large boulders. The bed of the *wady* was perhaps a hundred yards across. The aeroplane had crashed on the left-hand northern side of it which Wreaks had chosen at the last moment; the boulders were fewer there. On the far side was a little trickle of water running among the stones, expanded here and there in its course into shallow stagnant puddles, marked by a clump of reeds or coarse grass. On the bed of the *wady* itself there was no vegetation growing among the white and blue polished stones. Wreaks scooped up water to wash his hands and face, then he filled the empty thermos with water and drank his fill, and then made a little pit in the

## CRASH IN MONGOLIA

bed of the trickle of water and held his injured foot in it.

The water was pleasant and refreshing, though not very cold. It tasted of iron. "It's handy," he said. "But what a place to crash!"

When he turned and saw the machine lying in a river-bed among so many broken boulders and big rocks he marvelled how he had got down without worse damage.

There were no traces of life at the pool; no footprints of beasts or birds. "There must be other water not far off that they prefer," he argued. "I shall have to shoot something for supper. I've got my pistol."

He had left it in the front cockpit of the aeroplane, and a sudden fear that Shap had taken it assailed him, and he began to hobble back after he had filled up the thermos flask again.

How lonely the dry river-bed with its loosely cobbled floor and the white wings lying broken under the sunshine of Mongolia! How lonely! How silent to ears jaded by the roar of engines never ceasing day or night! How silent! Solitude, loneliness, emptiness, silence—Wrecks had experienced these often enough when planing down with a shut throttle from a height of 20,000 feet above the earth, through a desert of cloud forms or phantom Polar sea. At such times he would hear nothing but the *whick, whick, whick* of the slowly spinning airscrew, and would see no living thing in the desert about him unless, perchance, it were the moving phantom of himself: his shadow.

But he was not at the mercy of the desert or the sky. He was free, happy as a living bird,

full of mastery. With a movement of his thumb he could make the empty spaces echo, and in ten minutes he could descend gently among the 'planes which circled about the grassy aerodrome. If he were pressed for time he could put the machine in a spin and come down as fast as the angels falling out of heaven, watching the earth appear through the clouds and open out to him while it revolved like a roulette wheel slowly coming to rest. In a minute he could be listening to empty-headed laughter and a jazz record on the gramophone.

But in this desert of the earth he moped feebly, seeking shade by lying under the monoplane's broken wing and rousing himself only to look at the fractured steel of the undercarriage.

Five pebbles were balanced on the dead-white scarred back of a hand. The wrist flicked and four were caught in the palm. But the game of knucklebones is played the other way: thrown up from the palm and balanced on the back of the hand. Three stayed and two rolled off. Two stayed and three fell. Four stayed and one fell. One remained, balanced alone, and four were scattered. . . . But at all events they clinked together, making a sound to break the monotony of hunger.

If he could not take a siesta, he could lie with his eyes tightly shut; if he could not forget food, he could tighten his belt. He could make a target of a pebble balanced on a rock and sit in the shade and throw others to knock it off.

For the last hour before sunset he sat and massaged his foot, resolving to spend the whole of the next morning in the same dismal occupation,

## CRASH IN MONGOLIA

since as soon as the inflammation went down he would be able to move about and find something to eat. He could not climb the bluff until his foot was better, and the thought came to him that there might be herds of sheep, or, who knows, yaks, grazing within sight on that stony land, or a line of Bactrian camels crossing the desert laden with rhubarb, within a mile of where he lay starving. At last the sun began to set and he climbed up into the cockpit where he had laid his sandwiches. It was only two minutes to three by the chronometer. The sun set at twenty past nine in England, and he decided that he would go by local time for his meals. Otherwise he would have to keep himself awake at night and eat in the dark.

He took out one sandwich and ate it very slowly, crumb by crumb, washing it down with a pint or so of water. The other sandwich he put away, though he was ravenously hungry after his meal, and as he drew on his airman's leather suit and the fleece-lined thigh boots, the fur gauntlets and the fur-lined hat, it seemed to him that he never would be able to go to sleep. But he was still weary after his flight, and exhaustion gained the victory over hunger. After half an hour he was peacefully asleep, his last thought being a hope that he would be awakened by the crunch of footsteps on the loose stones.

The sun was hot upon him ; he was drenched in sweat and his head ached. It was late, and he had been sleeping for hours in his thick fur-lined leather suit. The stones near him were hot to the touch when he sat up. He felt ill and faint with hunger, and staggering on to his feet hobbled

painfully to the 'plane, pulled the sandwich out of its hiding-place, and looked at it.

"I daresay a rescue-party will be here by lunch-time with gallons of hot bovril," he said to himself, and took a bite. Angrily and reluctantly he ate the two slices of desiccated bread and the withered slice of tongue that curled black and greasy between their roughness. A crumb fell, and when he had finished he went down on hands and knees to pick over the stones until it was retrieved.

It had been a hot, absolutely windless day, but in the afternoon the wind began to blow gently from the south, and it was hot in his mouth and on his skin. On the previous day such a wind would have rejoiced him, since he was thinking then only of flying his kite, but he no longer cared about it and did not bother to climb up to the bluff or stir out of his cabin under the wing. When he did peer out the sky seemed to foreshadow a break in the weather, for it had darkened, though without any cloud showing or the sunlight diminishing. For a few moments he wondered whether it might not be the prelude to an eclipse of the sun, but he remembered that eclipses do not last much more than an hour from first to last. By five o'clock in the afternoon (by what he thought the local time) the sky had grown a strange brown colour, and he feared that a great storm was about to break out.

"I should have unfastened the whole of the other wing of the aeroplane and have carried it bodily up on to the bluff. If there is a great downpour this *wady* may fill suddenly and wash



## CRASH IN MONGOLIA

me and the 'plane itself away while I am asleep. I should have little chance in such a wild rush of waters."

While this fear was still bothering him, and he was resolving that if it were to rain really hard it would be more sensible to sleep in the open on the bluff, the sound of a few heavy drops on the 'plane over his head startled him by their force and weight.

"It is more like hail than rain; I must see that I have not left anything in the open which will be damaged. But danger or no, I'm damned if I sleep out in a hail storm." And he was surprised, because the air was still hot and scorching, and the wind was from the south, all of which made hail seem unlikely.

Thinking these thoughts, he began to crawl out through the little doorway he had left in his cabin (after he had walled it), and while he was on his hands and knees in the entrance he was surprised to see a big brown grasshopper just in front of him.

"Hallo, what are you doing?" he asked the insect; and quickly, before it could jump, he caught it, and without reflecting, broke off its head while it was still looking at him, and then, pulling off the legs and wings, popped it into his mouth. It was bitter and oily, but it seemed to him good because it was food and the first solid thing he had swallowed for more than a week. All this happened while he was still on his knees in the doorway of his cabin, but as soon as he was outside he saw that the ground was covered with other grasshoppers or locusts. They were perched on the tops of the big pebbles,

sitting crosswise, or on the rounded sides of them, with their heads tipping up or down, and in their folded-up state, with their round ends (their faces), they looked like large brown pocket-knives. It was queer to see so many living creatures suddenly in a place so barren. They did not jump about, but sat still where they had fallen, composing themselves, and then crawling tentatively a step or two on to the top of a pebble.

The smooth upper surface of the 'plane was dotted over with their long bodies, and he understood suddenly that what he had thought were hailstones were really locusts. There were locusts in the air also, falling thinly with expanded wing-cases and feebly whirring glassy wings.

He caught another of them and mechanically killed it, peeled it of wings and legs and chewed it up.

"Food. They are food. I am saved," he said, but they were not tolerable uncooked, and he began to catch and kill a number of the insects, killing them by breaking their heads off with his nail and throwing their bodies into the leather case of the thermos flask which Mrs. Beanlands had left behind. When he had caught and killed a couple of dozen of them, he stopped to build himself a fire with a few strips of spruce and shreds of doped aeroplane fabric. Over this he sprinkled a little petrol and lit it with his cigarette-lighter. It flared up violently, wasting itself while he sought feverishly for a steel wire on which he threaded the locusts and held them out to toast.

They scorched quickly; their wings burnt away and the lower joints of their legs; then their

## CRASH IN MONGOLIA

armour-plated bellies grew glossy and transparent with oil and they split like little sausages, and a smell more delicious than anything he had ever savoured came from them. It was a smell like fish, like fresh-water fish, something like grilled trout. His mouth was running now with sweet saliva, his eye was wet with a big tear, and his fingers shaking feverishly. He could not wait for them to cool before he began to eat them, and he burnt himself the more since his mouth had grown unapt to hot things.

The locusts were delicious cooked, tasting like a mixture of shrimps and sausages and baked bananas. When he had toasted and eaten all that he had caught, he set to work to catch some more. He was in a frenzy, and pursued them in the fury of his appetite, fearing that they might all take wing and depart suddenly. In his haste he no longer bothered to kill them cleanly, but crushed and maimed the insects by breaking off legs or heads indiscriminately, and throwing the bodies rapidly on to the heap he was collecting, and pursuing them on hands and knees. At that rate it was not long before he had made himself a heap of dead and living broken bodies which would have filled a gallon measure, and with these he was content for the time, and only puzzled himself how to cook them quicker than by toasting them two or three at a time on a wire. He must roast them on a hot plate, and picking up his screwdriver and hammer he began to lever off an aluminium footplate from the top of the damaged wing, a plate which served to step on when the petrol tank was being filled. But before he had wrenched this off another idea came to

him, and he unfastened a disc from one of the wheels and poured his locusts into that. Soon his fire was lighted anew, and he was engaged in roasting a great mass of the insects, raking them over and over with a screwdriver as they became scorched too much on one side.

While he was eating them tears welled up continually in his eye; he was beside himself in an ecstasy of satisfaction and impatience and he gorged upon the food, and when they were all gone he was not content but had to set about catching another bagful and roasting another dish, and these also were eaten in the same way.

By that time it was too dark for him to see to collect any more of the insects, but for a while he delayed going to rest, and sat watching the last embers of his fire burning away to ash. Sitting there he fell asleep.

Half an hour later he woke up with terrible pains in his stomach. He was sick continually, and in such agony that he could not stifle his moans. This lasted until nearly morning, when he was able to feel his way across to the runnel and get himself a drink of water and sponge the perspiration off his forehead and wash his hands.

In this way he was taught that he must be moderate after his fast, and although he was so weak he could scarcely move, he was about directly he could see, in the first light before dawn, collecting the sleeping locusts in bagfuls, for he thought with terror that when the sun rose the swarm would take wing and fly away, leaving him with no more provision than he had before they came. The locusts did indeed rise up and fly on, but as other locusts began dropping

## CRASH IN MONGOLIA

soon after midday there was no great diminution in the supply. During early morning, and in the course of the day, he caught and killed nearly a bushel of the insects, working until he was almost fainting with exhaustion, but he did not eat any, since he was determined to control his appetite and diet himself until his stomach was normal.

While he was at work during the afternoon, slipping and sliding over the loose round stones, scaring the locusts to take wing at his approach, and batting them down with a piece of plywood, he rested for a moment and, looking up, saw a stream of about a dozen birds flying overhead. They travelled rapidly, and it seemed to him that they were pursuing a thin curtain of locusts, which, warping on the eastern wind, had passed over a little while before. The birds were soon out of sight behind the bluff, but Jimmy stood for some time, hoping to see them again, and watching the travelling locusts which so much resembled a travelling curtain of falling rain. During that evening and the succeeding days, he frequently saw birds of different kinds, which were following the locusts and feeding on them. Some of the birds were about the size of English starlings, but had rose-coloured breasts ; the few which he saw on the ground, running about and eating locusts, seemed to be ordinary English starlings.

It gave him a great deal of pleasure whenever he saw these birds ; they were evidence, he thought, that he was near the edge of the desert, but perhaps the real reason of his pleasure was because they were a familiar sort of bird, which is found near houses and in gardens and orchards,

## MODERN PROSE

and he felt less lonely after he had seen them. The nearest he ever got to any of these birds was forty or fifty yards, and though a starling is a poor target for an automatic at that range, he would doubtless have shot at them if he had not been busy catching locusts at the time.

That evening he ate not more than a dozen roasted locusts, which tasted even more delicious than they had done the previous night, perhaps because he took a good deal more care in cooking them. After this meal he could not sleep for hunger for several hours.

Next morning he made himself a meal of forty locusts and felt no ill-effects. As the sun rose the insects took wing, and were almost all gone by ten o'clock, but other locusts began dropping all through the late afternoon. He collected another heap, and saw that with what he had got he would be saved for many days to come. But he saw also that it was no good his catching a fortnight's supply of locusts if he could not cure them and keep them from going rotten. Had he possessed either salt or vinegar, or oil, it would have been easy, but lacking all condiments he could only think of one method, viz., of parching them by roasting them as slowly as possible on a hot plate over the embers, and then packing them tightly in bags.

For this purpose he sacrificed the leather seat cushions, turning them inside out. At the end of the day's work he had one cushion stuffed tight with cured locusts, and a second about a third full. He had worked hard all day, and was beginning to be alarmed because he had used so much of his fuel. To economize it, he determined

## ELEVENTH HOUR

only to make a fire when he was curing a large number of the insects at once.

*The Grasshoppers Come.* 1931.

### 2. Eleventh Hour

The sun had set as they got there ; already it was dusk. Dogs barked, and one or two women's heads were thrust out of the houses, but they did not come forward to welcome them. Instead of the usual press, half a dozen children raced to meet them, naked in the snow, and headed by a boy and a girl who gazed at Smith with unsmiling serious faces. Ignoring the guards, the boy called out to Opechancanough : " He looks weary enough, but then you have been a month upon the road."

Opechancanough glanced at him crossly ; he guessed that the boy was repeating his father's words, and that Powhatan was jealous of his not having surrendered his prisoner to him before. But his face softened as he went up to the girl, ran his hand over her bare shoulders and knocked a few white chits of snow out of her black hair.

" I have brought a white man to look at, child, and white men's swords and lightning tubes and seeds of thunder. My women will grow a field of it next year."

Smith looked at the children while Opechancanough was speaking, and smiled at them from policy ; he was struck by their imperious manners and their gravity. Then he was startled by a sudden shout from his guards, who had halted. The children ran off again and vanished.

## MODERN PROSE

The nearest of the houses was larger than any of those that Smith had seen in the Indian villages he had visited ; in the darkness under a huge tree, it stretched an immense length of unwind-ded blackness. The branches above it were lit up by two long shafts of flickering light. The patches of thin snow were luminous and made the surroundings darker, the river's expanse limitless, a field of darkness. The cold was terrible, and Smith standing, halted between his guards, was cold with fear. He knew that he was come to his end.

A room that was like the gallery of an Elizabethan mansion blazed with light. The flames of a great fire leapt in the middle of the room, and down the sides thirty torches flared, lighting up the packed ranks of armed men who lined the walls. At the far end of the room, amidst a posy of painted faces and naked limbs, Powhatan reclined upon the dais of his bed. There was a deafening shout of triumph, then not a muscle of all these faces moved, and Smith, blinded by the light, stepped forward unsteadily, frowning and screwing up his eyes. The air was hot and smoky ; there was the smell of burning resin, of Indians and of hides. Smith's courage came back to him with the touch of the hot air from the fire, and with perfect self-possession he let his eye travel slowly round the walls, gazing at the armed men, at the torch-bearers, and at the splendid group round the enthroned Powhatan : twenty wives, youths and children, among whom he recognized the two young creatures who had greeted them. Then, only when he had looked his fill, did he step forward and salute the monarch. He had



## ELEVENTH HOUR

wondered what shift he could adopt to impress and astonish his host, but after one look at Powhatan he knew that no trick could save him. There was too cold a humour in that implacable American face, too destructive an intelligence in that eye.

Smith was come, he knew, to his death, but he carried himself well and could even feel glad that he should have lived to see the court of this savage king and not have fallen to an arrow in the woods. But before death there was ceremony to be observed.

Opossyquinuske, the Queen of Appomattox, was there, and he smiled with recognition as she stepped out with a basin of water and held it up for him to rinse his hands. She was doing him great honour, but she met his eyes sternly, with no smile to answer his, as she handed him the bunch of turkey feathers to dry himself. Food was set before him. He must feast before his death, and while he ate, the Indians spoke, determining the manner of his execution: Powhatan briefly and pithily, Opechancanough only nodding his head in assent and supplementing his brother with a single word, but one or two of the other chiefs took longer and seemed to raise objections. Smith did not listen to their words, or heed their gestures, but ate steadily, letting his eye rove almost cheerfully around the garish scene. The impassivity of the silent, motionless guards, the unwinking country stare of Powhatan's fat wives, all combined to give him the impression that he was dreaming, or that this period of eating and waiting was an illusion.

Only the children seemed unconscious of this timelessness. They moved their heads and whis-

## MODERN PROSE

pered to each other, and in their dark childish faces there was something Egyptian, something Persian. Smith caught the boy's eye and smiled, caught the girl's and smiled again. She smiled back at him a little shyly, blushed and turned to her brother. This was the first smile Smith had received in Powhatan's palace. A people so naturally merry had been changed suddenly, distorted and grimly stiffened by their ritual. There were only three smiling faces in the great crowded room : Smith's, the little girl's and Powhatan's. But the king's smile was full of cruel humour and was for himself alone.

Smith finished eating and rinsed his hands again and sat patiently while an old man talked wearily. Then there was a sudden stir, men were moving and Smith had only time to glance with admiration again at the naked child, when he was suddenly seized and thrown down at full length, and his head thrust back on to a great stone which two men had rolled into the centre of the floor.

The fire was so close to him that he felt it almost scorching his wrist ; looking up, he saw the raised stone heads of tomahawks above him, poised to strike, and the wildly excited faces of his two executioners. Two men kneeling behind him held him with a long buckskin thong slipped behind his back and over his two shoulders, the ends of which they slipped under the stone.

The unwinking blue eyes watched the stone tomahawks swing high for the blow ; something was said in a shrill voice, there was a gruff answer, and something which he could not see shot across the floor and fell on top of him. For a fraction of a second, before it reached him, Smith thought

## ELEVENTH HOUR

that this object was a dog, and shivered convulsively, but the next moment a child's body was lying sprawling over his, then Pocahontas was astride his chest, laying her face on his.

The stone tomahawks wavered for a moment, the thong slackened, but no one spoke or interrupted the child as she cried out with pathetic, tiger-cat defiance: "He is mine: my man. I take him." Then, a little less certainly, she added: "I am old enough. I want him. He can make me beads and copper bells."

Powhatan considered for a moment silently. Pocahontas was very young; it was absurd for her to claim to adopt this prisoner as a right, but he was very fond of her, and it would be difficult to have the man killed without making her furiously angry. The white man would be useful, no doubt, if he were one of the tribe, if he could really be trusted. On the other hand, if in a year or two he married Pocahontas, he might become a dangerous rival. But that was not an immediate danger, whereas his usefulness would begin at once.

"Very well," he said. The guards stepped back. Pocahontas jumped up and gave Smith a pull as he scrambled to his feet. Her eyes shone, her face was radiant; she showed all her teeth in a delighted smile as she seized hold of him and embraced him.

*Pocahontas, or The Nonparell of Virginia.* 1933.

## IV

R. C. HUTCHINSON

### The Penitence Chamber

[From a long novel set partly in England and partly in Post-War Germany. The boy Klaus, really half-German, believes himself wholly German, and suffers bitterly from the ragging of his German comrades in the monastery school where he is an unhappy boarder.]

"HAD you a reason for attacking the first boy?" the Abbot asked.

"Yes, Holy Father."

"Are you sorry now?"

"No, Holy Father."

"No?"

"No, Holy Father."

The first "no" had sent a shiver of horror through the four assistants. Even the Writer put down his pen and for the first time looked with an almost human interest at the culprit. Brother Laud's face had suddenly grown whiter. Only the Abbot was not surprised. He held Klaus's eyes with his own faint blue ones, at once inquiring for and acknowledging truth of fact.

"But you will tell Erich that you are sorry?" he said.

That he could hardly refuse; but the horror of the Brothers had goaded him, and a wave of contempt for their pious faces and horrified eyes

## THE PENITENCE CHAMBER

made him hostile. He wanted to be virtuous not for the Abbot's sake, but the desire to show the old man that his spirit was greater. In the face of a greatness he admired he wanted above all to be great. When he spoke his voice was thin and unnatural, but he pronounced the words carefully.

"I will apologize, Holy Father, but he must apologize first."

The Abbot leant forward, blinked once, and focused his eyes afresh.

"That is not Christ's spirit," he said. Then, "Tell me, what harm did he do you?"

"He called me an Englishman."

A smile flickered in the old man's eyes, but it was gone before Klaus saw it.

"I have known many Englishmen," he said slowly, "amongst them brave men, great men, and good men."

Klaus was silent. He waited for the Abbot to reason with him, but the Abbot did not mean to prolong the trial. He moved a little in his chair to shake off the cramp that was beginning to grip him, and then spoke quietly, addressing himself to the offender as if no one else were present.

"You have done wrong, Klaus, and before you can enter again on your Christian life you must seek God's forgiveness by Confession, by Penitence, by Priestly Absolution. But you are not ready to seek forgiveness in the name of Him who bade His disciples turn the other cheek to those who smote them. Your body must be chastised before your spirit can be brought to repentance. You will be segregated from your

fellows and made to fast until you have shown humility. You can go now."

Klaus wavered. He had made his gesture, and he wanted now to get right with the old man who spoke so quietly, whose slow, exact speech seemed to come from a mind which had reasoned everything, which saw every aspect of the conflict, weighing every emotion against the vast weight of his experience, measuring stubbornness against the final will. Before that authority his obstinacy was the gesture of a pygmy matched against a giant. Brother Laud he would have defied till defiance grew monotonous, but to the Abbot he would have surrendered. He turned, however, having bowed perfunctorily, and left the room. Outside, the novice who had summoned him was waiting.

The candle had burnt itself out when he woke, and the stove, by its smell and clicking, showed that it would not last much longer. On the wall above him the moon made a silver-blue rectangle.

The soreness of his hip-bone resting on the hard floor had woken him, and when he had turned into a less uncomfortable position he tried to sleep again. But the strangeness of his surroundings and the continued discomfort kept him awake, so that presently he raised his head and supported it on one hand, his elbow propped on the under-blanket. Limp and half-wakeful, he watched the patch of moonlight with one open eye, listening to the close silence.

When the clock struck it startled him, actually shaking his body as the first stroke crashed against the utter quietness. It struck twice, and

## THE PENITENCE CHAMBER

the sound died slowly, leaving at last a silence intensified. It was a queer, unpleasant hour to be awake.

When a few minutes had passed the stove made a little guttural noise and went out, leaving the rectangle of moonshine the only light in the room. Klaus had had little experience of such darkness, still less of so profound a silence. The smallest of his movements seemed to intrude upon it, and he had the sensation of hiding, the fictitious but potent fear that any sound, a cough or rustle or even the sound of his breathing, would betray him. He moved cautiously into a better position and held himself absolutely still. Then he thought he heard a noise quite close to him, a faint, gentle tapping; quite regular, ceasing for a few seconds and then continuing unbroken for a full minute.

He tried to believe that it was imagination, and dropping his head he covered both ears with the blanket. He reminded himself how thick were the walls which surrounded him. But to pay no attention was more unbearable than listening, and soon he uncovered one ear, twisting his finger in the hole to make sure that his imagination could not deceive him. There was silence for a few moments, dead silence, then the noise began again, quite unmistakably, like the sound of a finger-nail tapping a wooden table. It grew no louder, but as it continued it seemed more distinct, sharper, and more suggestive of animate agency. He tried to subdue his heart-beats so that he could listen more attentively.

As far as he could remember there were no cracks in the walls or floor, but he had not

examined them carefully. The walls were thick enough to all appearance, a foot in thickness, he would have guessed, but the Abbey had stood for many centuries, and it might be that they had crumbled away inside, making a haunt for every kind of vermin. He could not connect the noise with any creature he had known or heard of, and with so little fact to work upon his sleepy mind began to rove wildly, conjuring unknown creatures that might have survived—or even achieved their racial distinction—solely within these hidden precincts. He longed to be asleep again, and he thought now that his discomfort would be no barrier to sleep if only the tapping and the uneasiness it engendered were to cease. But the noise went on, and now that he had surrendered to little fears he found larger ones arraying themselves around him.

Whatever made the tapping could only be small, and it would do him no harm, he told himself, if a mouse or some kind of beetle ran across his face ; only women were frightened of such creatures ; but in this darkness and at such a ghostly hour the experience would be unpleasant, more than unpleasant if a little army of beetles, attracted by the warmth, swarmed through a crack in the wall and all over his body. It might, moreover, be rats, and he fancied he had heard it said that a rat will go for a man's throat, fastening its little teeth so tight that nothing will shake it off. It would not be easy to ward off an attack like that in the darkness, where an animal's lighted eye saw clearly, and he saw nothing. It was rubbish, perhaps. But if it were an army of rats ? There was a story about a bishop—he could not



## THE PENITENCE CHAMBER

remember the details, but what he could recall was enough to send a little shudder through his body. If anything did happen there was no means of summoning help. He could shout till he was hoarse, but no sound would penetrate the surrounding walls, and it was unlikely that enough would escape through the window to filter through other windows, far off, where the novices were sleeping. If he rang the bell it would only sound somewhere in the kitchens or in the manciple's dayroom—he knew that no one slept in any of the rooms beneath. A scullery-boy might hear it from the lower servants' dormitory, but as like as not he would pay no attention.

The tapping stopped while the realization of helplessness was taking possession of his mind; and with one sense unoccupied others became active. He thought he could smell smoke. It was only a faint smell, but enough to put his cloudy imagination on a new trail, and the idea of fire began to obsess him. Old buildings caught fire easily. He had read of such fires in newspapers, and had actually seen, from the window of a railway carriage, the gutted remains of the Hansenburger Schloss shortly after the conflagration. His wonder at the power of fire over a building so massive and solid had fixed the picture in his memory, and now in a flash he could see the Abbey in the same ruination, charred walls guarding emptiness. If such a fire were to occur to-night, would they remember a solitary pupil in the Penitence Chamber? Or would he stand beating the door with the smoke growing thick in the room and the flames crackling beneath him? At that moment he resolved that

as soon as daylight came he would ring the bell and agree to ask Erich's pardon.

He sniffed. The smell of smoke was no stronger, but undoubtedly it was there. The tapping had started again.

Something touched the back of his neck, lightly as a feather's point, and throwing off the blanket he jumped to his feet. The blanket swept over the bench and knocked the glass on to the floor. He took a step forward and his eye caught his shadow against the patch on the wall. Suddenly unnerved he gave a shout, and the walls echoed it. He stood still, trembling. In the faint glimmer of moonlight that the wall reflected into the room he could just see the blankets he had thrown aside as a patch of deeper darkness; and he thought that the patch moved.

For a full three seconds he could not make himself move. Cold as he was, he could feel little drops of sweat running down, inside his skin as it seemed, from his shoulders towards his waist. He had known fear before; but it was fear of some definite danger, and he had relished it, a cool pricking of the temples and a liquid coldness pouring upwards from his thighs to his neck. Now, when lonely imprisonment and darkness had combined in a strange chemistry to make a new sensation, unreal in essence yet so real in power that its presence seemed to breathe upon him, the horror was large enough to stun his reason. He could only stand and endure it, waiting, petrified, for the thing he feared to become concrete, and in its physical grip release him from the ghostly ambush. He moved at last, almost without volition as if walking in sleep,

stealthily as if pursued, towards the door. A yard away from the door he partially recovered self-control and sprang towards it; seized the latch, jerked it up, and tugged. Without resistance the door opened.

He had tugged in a vague hope of breaking the lock, and when the door yielded his first thought was that some one who had just unlocked it was pushing at the same moment. He stepped back and peered into the black darkness outside. He could see no one, but it was easy to imagine that some one was standing back, waiting to see what he would do, and his mind projected the image of a monk's cloaked figure so vividly into the blank pit that it almost shaped itself before his physical eyes, and he whispered, "Who's that?" When he had waited and received no answer he stretched out his hand and leaned forward; advanced a pace and stretched out farther still, dreading the first touch and almost as frightened of touching nothing. His hand met no resistance, and when, as he still advanced, the pressure of the wall against his right elbow ceased, he slipped sideways, turned and began to run down the stairs as fast as the darkness and the uncertain steps would let him.

In the spreading noise which his clumsy footsteps made he fancied that he heard some one following him, but he did not pause to listen. With his arm scraping along the wall he plunged down recklessly, often slipping and stumbling, conscious of a supreme fear—that the door at the bottom should be locked. But when he met it, with a physical and mental shock, for he had not expected it so soon, the door was on the

latch. He pulled it open, one arm held out behind to ward off a pursuer, wriggled round, and found himself in the open quadrangle.

He shut the door behind him, careful now to make as little noise as possible, and with the fear of the invisible pursuer still upon him held the iron handle firmly. He had come nearer to the natural world. The silence was awesome, and in the moonlight the quadrangle might have been a stage-setting, unreal, but in its outline so close a copy of the quadrangle he knew that through the weirdness of its presentation he could still see it as a place of human occupation, soothing in its familiarity. Reason spoke strongly enough, after its interval of silence, to tell him that in a few hours' time the figures of every day would be moving to and fro across the stage now darkened, that life would awake and resume its normality. But he kept hold of the iron handle. The air, clean and sweet after the stone-odoured dankness of the Penitence Chamber, unstirred by wind, so that its coldness did not press too hard on his skin, was sharp in his nostrils. For the first time since he had woken the excitement that still vibrated in his chest assumed a slightly pleasurable colour, and he found the beginning of zest in the very grotesqueness of the lime-lighted imitation world in which he stood alone. The moon itself, stiff and polished, was only a part of the backcloth; but the stars, flickering, were more real than the quadrangle itself, and in their witnessing presence he felt less lonely, as if God were watching him. If there had not been walls all round his fear would have fallen from him, and he would have been content, despite the coldness of his body,

## THE PENITENCE CHAMBER

to stay contemplating the hard, clear stillness of an hour he had not found before. But behind those walls people were sleeping ; in any of those windows some one might be sitting, invisible, watching.

With those imagined eyes upon him he began to think practically ; slowly, as the horror of the darkness behind was quieted by the sense of access to space unlimited ; and as the moonlight itself became gradually familiar, the shock of its eerie illumination ceased to hold him spellbound. The sense of freedom was illusory, for he was bound by high walls, gates, and buildings. Did he want to be entirely free, or was he content simply to have escaped from the pressing walls and the frightening narrowness of the Penitence Chamber ? Considering the question, he decided that he wanted companionship ; to lie down on his own bed in the long line in the pupils' dormitory ; even to stand before Brother Laud and listen to his wrathful upbraiding, drawing comfort from the unmysterious reality of human speech. But as he thought of Brother Laud he saw again the narrow head, the long goose-like face, the narrow lips always pushed into a little pout of schooldame's asperity. He thought of the glint of triumph, quiet, pious triumph, in Brother Laud's cold eyes as the Abbot pronounced sentence. And the spirit of rebellion, mortified, struggled again to move him.

He could get away. Over the wall. He had seen a hole that would do for foothold. He could stretch to the top from there, pull himself up, swing round on his belly, drop down to the other side, clear and away to the valley. Then let the

Holy Brothers chase him, holding their skirts as they ran! He smiled as he thought of them running and shouting, calling him back to be a good pupil under their maternal care. "Klaus! Klaus! Come back and apologize to poor Erich! Come and be locked up till you're sorry, and then do penance. We shan't hurt you. Come back! Come back!" Old women, the pack of them, and the dithering pupils who obeyed them were not much better. Hans was too heavy and loutish to run. Paul, Arthur, would they scramble after him if they saw him scaling the wall? With the plain stretching in front and his legs underneath him—they felt watery now, but they would stiffen when put into action—he would have his own place with the herd. Old men, lean novices, downtrodden pupils—he would show them who Klaus Gotthold was; Klaus Gotthold that they had called an Englishman; Klaus Gotthold that they had locked up in the Penitence Chamber.

He was still standing motionless, working up the courage that he needed for the swift dash to the wall and the scramble over. It wouldn't be easy, that wall—it would mean a clean jump to the foothold, several, before his foot found it, and luck enough to find a fist grip that would steady him till he had stretched up to the top edge. He hadn't quite recovered from the scare—a childish scare he thought it now—of running down the stairs with the feeling of some one behind. He must have just a few more seconds to collect himself, to be finally persuaded that flight was better than submission. The pause gave opportunity for his thoughts to run again, and as he warmed his courage with the ease of

## THE PENITENCE CHAMBER

the first stage in his flight he wondered for the first time why the door of his prison had been left open. It was odd that the novice, trained to such punctiliousness in performing the details of his secular as well as his spiritual duties, should have omitted to turn the key. It was, surely, the novice who had last—and then he remembered. It was Brother Peter who had been the last to visit him in the Penitence Chamber.

So like Brother Peter to overlook such a duty ! No doubt he had promised Brother Laud, who would have given him permission, to make sure that the prison was secure when he left it. Probably he had muttered the words, " I must lock the door again," over and over as he had groped up the dark staircase ; and then, his soft heart overcome by the spectacle of Klaus's disgrace, had thought no more about it, and gone away with only the prisoner in his mind. Brother Laud's anger would know no bounds when he found out. He would report the matter to the Abbot, and might even suggest that Peter had allowed his pity so far to move him as to make him deliberately release the culprit. Not that Peter would be much affected by Brother Laud's anger, or even a rebuke from the Abbot ; he had suffered remorse for weightier sins than petty carelessness ; but the knowledge that a boy he had befriended had taken advantage of his carelessness would come as a crushing blow to the old man. He was one of the petticoated mob, Brother Peter, as soft and futile as the rest ; but there was, for Klaus, less of the woman in him, more of the child. He had no airs, no pretentious authority. His weakness was of a kind hard to

strike at, as different from Brother Laud's lean frailty as a puppy's from a wasp's. And beneath the hard crust, newly formed, of his contempt for the Abbey and all its ordinances, there remained in Klaus a lingering respect, mixed of tenderness and awe, for the white flame which it enshrined; the flame that had lately warmed him and that he saw burning most fiercely in Brother Peter's mild and clouded eyes.

His thoughts running fast in the new direction, he tried to find a compromise. The key might be hanging on a nail somewhere inside. If he could find it he would creep back—yes, it was worth facing the dark stairs again—lock the door, and replace the key before he made his escape. It would look then as if he had got out by some other way. But there was only one other way, the window, and that had looked impossible. Still, he would look again. And then logic pointed to the obvious solution. If escape through the window was possible, that was how he must do it, and if he left sufficient evidence the fact that the door was unlocked would lose all its importance. He hardly waited to let his ideas crystallize into a formal resolution; and turning round, he cautiously opened the door, using both hands to prevent the latch clicking. The dread of darkness returned as he gazed into it, and again his mind made images out of the pliant opacity. If he had waited for courage it would have failed him, and he went inside quickly and pushed to the door. The noise his first steps made had comforted instead of alarming him; noise, he decided, was after all his best weapon against imagined terrors, and he started to mount the steps boldly, banging



## THE PENITENCE CHAMBER

his feet on the stone and holding his body erect, as if to claim lawful passage. With his nerves thus tightened his courage increased, and he was ashamed to think of his headlong flight. He could remember now that a few yards away the open sky hung serenely over the quiet quadrangle, where the air was too cold for the breathing of mental bogies. Perhaps, after all, he would stay in the Penitence Room till morning. He had learnt how to deal with darkness.

*The Unforgotten Prisoner.* 1933.

## V

CHARLES MORGAN

### The Prisoners Make a Tunnel

[From a philosophic novel dealing with British officers who were prisoners of war in Holland. Lewis, a meditative intellectual, who tries to practise a kind of quietism, is driven by circumstances to break the satisfying peace of his prison life and join in an organized attempt to escape by underground tunnel.]

It was resolved that the mouth of the tunnel should be under Lewis's bed. A large boring should be carried across the room, and the earth from it packed handful by handful in the nine-inch space between wooden floor and concrete foundation. Under the path, under the rampart and its barbed wire, a narrow tunnel should then be pushed forward to the inner edge of the moat. The broader shaft would become a receptacle for earth from the narrower; the need for close, laborious packing would cease, and the narrow shaft, once begun, make swift progress. One night, perhaps in early autumn, twenty-six men would assemble at the moat's brim beneath an unsuspecting sentry. They would launch off into the water together. The sentry, in an embarrassment of targets, would miss his aim. At worst, twenty-four would clamber up the farther bank. Three might get to Rotterdam; two, it was hoped, to England.

## THE TUNNEL

To turn back a flap of linoleum and hinge a trap-door in the floor-boarding was easy enough. But how was the concrete to be broken? Lewis remembered that Willett was by profession a strong man and that the Commandant was of genial disposition.

"I can't get exercise, sir, not the right kind of exercise," Willett said. Exposing his muscles, he made it clear that they were deteriorating; his livelihood was slipping from him; when the war was done, his wife and children must starve. "Ja, ja," said the Commandant, "I will see what I can think of," but Lewis had already decided that what Willett needed was a heavy crowbar from the garrison store. This was obtained. Willett exercised himself with it conspicuously; the garrison, passing through the courtyard, were confirmed in their opinion that the English were mad; the Commandant, when he had guests, brought them to the window of his quarters to observe Willett's behaviour. They were well entertained by it.

Meanwhile two clubs were organized. The Photography Club, under Ballater's control, obtained permission to import oxygen, in which the Commandant saw no evil. The Boxing Club, advertised on the messroom notice board, invited the Commandant to be its Honorary President, and he knew at once how wrong he had been in supposing that the Englishmen disliked or laughed at him. "There is no greater honour," he said in a little speech after dinner, "than to be invited by your countrymen to share in their sport"; and for the first meeting of the Boxing Club, held in B Three Dormitory when dinner was over, he

put on his smartest uniform. Never since his coming to the fort had he enjoyed himself so much. The boxing itself was tedious, but he applauded with all his heart. To accept a few drinks, to refuse many more with a wag of his finger and a shake of his head, to unbend in a manner befitting a gentleman who knew how to preserve his dignity and yet be a "sport"—what could be more delightful? "To-night we are all sports together, isn't?"

"Yes, sir," said Ferrard, lifting his glass and his eyebrows, "all sports together! *Vive les Pays-Bas!*"

"*Vive les Pays-Bas!*" cried twenty-six Englishmen in chorus.

The Commandant rose to the toast. How the Englishmen cheered! How they sang! But their taste in music was execrable. Men of no other nation would play three gramophones together and shout them all down. But let them shout. Let them sing. The legend of this great party would spread to the Hague. No one could say hereafter that a Commandant was a failure who was thus welcomed into his captives' grotesque entertainments. At eleven o'clock he bade them good-night and withdrew. A few revellers escorted him to his lodgings and serenaded him. He thanked God that he had the gift of popularity. It was odd that he had ever doubted it.

A week later the Boxing Club met again. The Commandant was invited, but, feeling that habitual unbending might be bad for discipline, he made gracious excuses. The blinds of the dormitory were drawn. Drink was brought; three gramophones played; Sezley and Gestable

## THE TUNNEL

put on boxing-gloves and were prepared to box if any intrusion by the garrison staff should make boxing necessary. But they did not box. They stood in the ring and applauded themselves. The room was full of men shouting and singing and stamping their feet. To the sentries a few yards away, the uproar did not differ from that in which, a week earlier, the Commandant had shared. They continued on their beat ; the child-English were drunk again ; German officers would certainly have behaved with more dignity. Meanwhile Lewis's bed had been pulled out of its corner. The flap of linoleum was turned back, the trap-door opened. In each *crescendo* of cheering, Willett attacked the concrete with his crow-bar.

The material was stubborn and the attack prolonged. What had been a joke became a business. Spontaneity died. The cheering of boxers who did not box, the singing of bawdy songs by sober men, the intervening silences, the artificial cries of laughter and partisanship with which each hush was raked—all these it was necessary to orchestrate and control. Lewis stood on a trunk with an ivory hairbrush in his hand. He began to take pleasure in calling forth new combinations of sound ; they excited him and made him laugh. A group in a distant corner broke into song whenever his brush was pointed at it ; another group sprang into obedient competition ; when he stamped his feet, all feet were stamped ; when he beckoned sound towards him, sound came ; when both his hands were stretched out in repression, the uproar weakened. He signalled to Sezley and Gestable ; instantly the room was full of the thud

and patter of boxing-gloves beaten against a wall. A glance towards the crowbar having told him that Willett, with lips set and sweat running from him, was rested and prepared to attack again, he threw his clenched fists high above his head, the ivory brush flashed in the shine of the oil lamp, and the impact of steel upon concrete was drowned in yells of victory and groans of disappointment.

"That's enough," Willett exclaimed at last, standing clear. "You can dig to-morrow. Keep the party going till we've closed down the trap and squared off."

For a little while the noise was continued. Lumps of concrete were packed away into a locked trunk; by day they would be taken out to the ramparts one by one and dropped secretly into the moat. The meeting of the Boxing Club dispersed; members who slept in other dormitories reeled into the night, singing drunken catches, their gait carefully unsteady, their arms linked.

Gestable, inspired by the part he was playing, invented a liquorish quarrel. "Never been m'sober i'me life!" he protested with truth. And even Carroll-Blair's thin voice was to be heard uplifted in Harrovian song, which was all the song he knew.

Lewis, in bed at last, picked up a book, but could not read. Night rounds are made at fixed hours, he thought. If we have to dig late, we can avoid them. But better dig in the early evening. There are no dormitory rounds before midnight. The shriek of a distant train reminded him of his coming to the fort, of plodding across

## THE TUNNEL

the fields at Herriot's side. The noise of the shouting and the throbbing wail of the gramophones were still in his ears. He saw again the faces of the singers uplifted towards him, their open mouths, their fixed eyes—they had been like a ring of dogs howling at the moon; and he felt again the ivory hairbrush under his fingers. While the scene lasted he had been excited by it, had even been proud.

Ballater, in blue silk pyjamas, looked up from the magazine he was reading.

"Well?" he said. "All right? . . . pretty good staff work."

Sezley was lowering the oil lamps by their chains and puffing down their chimneys. The room fell into darkness and silence.

Lewis and Ballater shared a watch as diggers and carriers. One evening, when they were in the tunnel together, working by candlelight amid the thick smell of earth and crumbled masonry and stale air, Ballater dropped the tool he was using and said quietly, "It's a marvellous night outside. Did you notice? The Plough bright as if there were a frost, but everything sniffing of summer." He scraped sweat from his forehead with the edge of an earthy hand. "This hole stinks like the double-bottoms of a cruiser. . . . Come on, let's get the loose stuff shovelled back. We haven't room to work," and, kneeling across the tunnel in single file, they began like two dogs to scrape earth backward between their legs. This done, it was Ballater's turn to hold the candle while Lewis attacked the earth-face.

"My God, Alison," Ballater said, "why are

## MODERN PROSE

we burrowing here like moles? When you came into the fort did you imagine yourself doing this?"

Lewis was struck, not only by the shaft of irony that had touched Ballater, but by a feeling of guilt and desolation.

"No," he said. "I didn't see myself as a man of action."

"Never again? Not even after the war?"

Lewis was struggling with a ledge of earth in which stones were deeply embedded. When he had broken it down, he replied:

"Perhaps never again. I didn't swear to that. But I did swear to myself that while I was here and had this god-sent chance——"

He could not continue. In the confinement of the tunnel every conversation but a demand that the candle should be held higher or lower became ridiculous, and he returned to his work in silence. But his thought ran on. Solitude and a discipline of peaceful scholarship might prove, as Herriot had often suggested, not to be his ultimate way of life; he didn't know; that lay in the future; some day he might have strength enough to preserve an absolute stillness of the spirit, even amid the activities of the world. But if ever this was to become possible, it could be made possible in him, he believed, only by the discipline of quietness. The opportunity had been given him. He remembered with what delight and with what assurance he had welcomed it. Now, by every evening in the tunnel and by every thought of escape, he was betraying it.

"I'll take over," Ballater said, exchanging his candle for the tool with which Lewis had been



## THE TUNNEL

digging. "You've been hacking at it like a madman. I shall take life more easily. . . . It must be nearly time for our reliefs."

Work had begun again, when a sound behind them, at the entrance of the tunnel, told that the trap-door had been hastily closed.

"Some one coming," Ballater whispered, and ceased to dig, that the sound of his tool might not be heard above ground. "Better put out the candle."

"No light can show through if they've got the linoleum flap down. If they haven't, we're done."

"Still we may want the light later on. The Lord knows how long we may not have to sit here if Willett can't get rid of the man, whoever he is. It may be the Commandant come to be affable. He might stay for hours."

"If he does," Lewis added, "he'll notice that we don't come to bed."

"Oh, Willett will invent some lie."

"Can't go on lying for ever."

"Anyhow," Ballater said, "we shall quietly suffocate."

The candle was put out. They lay in darkness on their stomachs and waited. Lewis forgot that he was in the tunnel, and the bitterness of his self-reproach passed from him. We make ourselves, he thought, by struggle and rule, but a force deeper than our will, deeper than our consciousness, corrects our making. To cultivate the man of intellect is not enough, for stillness is a quality of the whole man. We are like the strings of a stringed instrument which, slackened in any part, are dead; they can yield no music but the music proper to themselves, and then only if their

tension be just. Each man must discover the perfect tension of his being—in action or solitude, in love or asceticism, in philosophy or faith—by continual adjustments of thought and experience; and he asked himself whether the particular seclusion of the fort might not be a phase from which he was emerging. What development of his scholarship would attend the fresh impulses stirring within him? But if the tunnel succeeds, he added, there may be no more scholarship. His longing for seclusion returned, but for a seclusion that seemed to him, as he strove now to imagine it, less wintry, more beautiful and flowering, than that by which he had been bound.

He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw the pale glimmer of the fist on which his cheek had been resting.

"The trap-door is being opened," Ballater said.

The gleam in the tunnel increased.

"All clear now," said Willett, in the hoarse whisper of one who had a habit of conspiracy.

"You fellows still alive?"

Weeks passed in digging and alarms. That he might not cease to read, Lewis imposed daily tasks on himself and performed them, but he was restless and troubled. When news was brought to him in Jedwell's room that the tunnel had been discovered, he started from his chair, thinking at first only of the failure of his enterprise, but, as he went towards the dormitory, joy mounted within him and he thought: Now I shall have peace. Now there'll be quiet again.

A servant in the dormitory had noticed the

crease made by the continual turning back of the linoleum, and, his curiosity aroused, had come upon the trap-door. Whether the man made this discovery by chance or had been sent to investigate by Dutch officers aroused by some suspicion was not known ; certainly he remained firm against threat and bribery, and could not be prevented from making his report. The Commandant was at first indignant. The English officers had betrayed his trust in them. They had rewarded his kindnesses by doing their utmost to ruin his career. Their ingratitude was shameful. Had he not come himself as a friend to share their entertainments in this very room ? An attempt was made to suggest to him that it was a duty of interned officers to escape if they could, but he was beyond reason. If he was allowed to remain serious, they were lost ; the wildest penalties would be imposed upon them ; no weapon could now be effective against him but ridicule ; only his vanity could be touched. While others argued and the Commandant raged, Ferrard brought salvation.

"In this very room we drank and we laughed," the Commandant cried. "We trusted one another and were friends. And you——"

"Yes, sir," said Ferrard quietly. "We were all sports together. *Vive les Pays-Bas !*"

The ring of serious, disappointed faces began to smile. The Commandant saw mouths opening to laugh. The intolerable levity of the English, who would laugh at anything ! Then suddenly, as he perceived that they were laughing at him, his expression changed from anger to a pitiable embarrassment. An instinct of self-preservation

## MODERN PROSE

enabled him to see their joke. He was delighted because he had seen it.

"*Les Pays-Bas*? The Low Countries? That was it—the tunnel under the ground? Even then—so early?"

He threw back his head and outlaughed them all. Before his mood could change, they began to show him their tunnelling equipment: old pyjamas stained with earth, their entrenching tool, the electric torches that had displaced candles which in the foul atmosphere of the inner tunnel would burn no longer, their stores of earth, Willett's crowbar, the rules and agenda of the Boxing Club.

"And I was your President!" he exclaimed, when the purpose of the Club had been made clear to him. But his face fell when he was invited to inspect the tunnel. "Won't you go down and look at it, sir?" Ferrard suggested. "We can lend you some kit." Should he preserve his dignity or in pyjamas regain the esteem of these barbarians? He smirked and hesitated. Pyjamas were brought and he suffered them to be put on over his uniform; gloves were provided; a scarf was tied over his head. His grotesque figure, having climbed through the trap-door, sank on its hands and knees and began to crawl into the hole.

"That's the end of that," Willett said gloomily, and turning to the servant who had discovered the tunnel, a timid little man in brown overalls, he exclaimed with bitter good-humour, "Are you the one man on earth who won't take a bribe?"

"Ja, mijnheer," the Dutchman answered, understanding nothing.

## THE TUNNEL

Lewis turned away with a smile. He could have shouted his gratitude for this saving farce. A weight had been lifted from him. This evening the tunnel under his bed would be empty ; he would light his candle and rebuild his screen of books. He was free again ; and when he returned to Jedwell's room it seemed to have recovered much of its former composure.

*The Fountain.* 1932.

## VI

### RICHARD CHURCH

#### 1. Turning a Sere Leaf

[From a novel presenting an Englishman embittered by the War, and by an unhappy marriage, who finds a new life in Paris, and becomes through love of a Frenchwoman reconciled again to life. The background of nature reinforces the healing influences. The philosophy is like that of Mr. J. C. Powys, "To forget and to enjoy."] ]

GREGORY WADE stood at the stern of the cross-Channel boat, gazing grimly at the receding cliffs of Dover. The fresh wind rubbed in the brim of his hat, and from time to time he unconsciously put up a thin hand to prevent the disturbance. He was too abstracted to be annoyed by the failure. Even when the wind grew more boisterous, wrenching at his spectacles and flinging out the skirts of his overcoat, he seemed to be oblivious of the good-natured overtures. He was fascinated by something that his mind saw beyond the cliffs. He stood under the spell of this reconstruction, the cliffs that symbolized it sinking lower and lower in the vault of the sky. As they dwindled, so his vision became less tangible, until at last he turned with a sigh of perplexity from the thin streak of vapourish grey. That mere pencil of shade upon the base of the blue dome, where the dazzling clouds sailed with such

## TURNING A SERE LEAF

solidity, could not possibly represent the scenes he was leaving ; the places, the people, the hopes and efforts, and the failures. The failures. Even these last were unreal. Their mark upon him ; the pallid flesh, the greyness of spirit, the unaccountable stupor that lay over his frozen mind ; even these had little significance under the touch of the impersonal wind and the salt tang of the foam.

He pulled his hat down over his ears, fumbled in his pocket for a loose cigarette, and decided that it was impossible to smoke. A passenger near him seemed to be threatening to speak, and he moved away discreetly, to lean over the rail and look down at the pile of trunks and mailbags. He stared at a new Daimler saloon car, and reflected bitterly that he was accompanying it, one of the two recent acquisitions of his prospective employer. A new car and a new secretary ; the one immaculate and the other badly scarred and chipped. What bad taste the man must have, not to find a secretary to match the car ; a royal blue secretary with chromium-plated fittings. A chromium-plated soul, and a brain with a selective gear !

Further comparisons were interrupted by the approach of the mechanic who was in charge of the car. The man had driven Wade from London to Dover, and the two therefore had some slight acquaintance. "She's lashed up all right, I think," said the mechanic, uneasy about his child. "Yes, she's not likely to start bucking," Wade answered. He did not want to talk, but there was no way to avoid it. The fellow was one of his own generation, the war generation. They

had already discovered that they had done similar service in France, Wade as a liaison officer and the man as an interpreter attached to the Engineers. Perhaps that explained why they were here now; selected for their jobs because they spoke French fluently in addition to their several other necessary qualifications. Wade asked himself, again with a touch of bitterness, what his own qualifications were, and he decided that they consisted in an ability to raise false hopes in other people; hopes that he seemed fated never to fulfil. Why was that? Because the world was awry; because he had returned to a peace-time world whose shape and gravitation were changed; because war had taken him too young and twisted the pliant sapling? Or, because one or two other people, for reasons or unreasons that he had not yet unravelled, had tortured and betrayed him?

This last inquiry still had power to pain him, and he stared a little more grimly at the noble piece of machinery below, and followed with even more sense of weary unreality the war-time reminiscences of his companion. The past; the war, and the decaying years after it; was that an idle story now? He saw it as a book, in which the Channel breeze now played, derisively flicking over page after page.

## 2. New Self Awakening

Gradually the sun rose above the mist, passing from red to white heat, and from heat to universal light that began to play upon the earth, opening



itself over the blue canopy and descending thence with a warmth and vitality that drew up the mist, dissolved it, and revealed an autumn scene fingered by the first frost. The tree-foliage hung lank and matted, and drops rolled off the dejected leaves, splashing on the windscreen or thumping on the roof. Where the sunshine fell the frost had melted, but every patch of shadow was still grey, the patterns of light not quite coinciding with the patterns of frost.

Bushes and longer grasses stood shrouded with frost-laced spider-veils, and single threads of half-invisible silver hung across the road from tree to tree. The world lay silent, except for the purring of the Daimler and the drippings from the trees. Wade leaned forward intently; he was listening to something not actual: the rustle of earth's tattered cloak as she gathered its once-gorgeous glories round her for protection against the cold.

By the time the party reached the northern edge of the woods of Fontainebleau the mist had disappeared. Wilson was now able to relax a little, and he tried to engage Wade in conversation.

"You're looking much better, sir," he said. "This life's a holiday, I reckon. I've never had such a peaceful time since the war."

"Yes; those were idyllic days, weren't they?"

Both the men laughed, and their talk steered towards the inevitable magnet, flowing on until it was interrupted by a tapping at the screen. Charles was pointing up one of the wide military rides, and making signs for the car to stop.

Everybody got out, throwing off coats and cloaks and raising town-pale faces to the sun. Profound silence held the world. Gradually it

yielded little secrets of sound : drip, drip from the leaves ; crisp breaking of hoar frost ; rustle of soil expanding in the warmth of the sunlight ; and the distant drumming of hooves on turf. Half a mile away up the slope of the ride a cavalry platoon was exercising. The tiny horsemen flashed as the ballet proceeded. Follow-my-leader in single file they galloped, describing circles, figures of eight, a distant living geometry of beauty. The spectacle was a fantasy, a Watteau-piece, taken from the seventeenth-century life of the palace beyond the trees : powder blue, roan, black and white, with glitter from harness and blade.

Charles stood staring, with Antoinette (his sister) on his arm. His lips moved as though he were trying to fit unspoken words to the rhythm of the cavalcade. Wade glanced at him, fascinated by the excitement in his face ; admiring and envying such power of spontaneous delight. Antoinette saw the glance, and returned it with a look of puzzled inquiry. It was so eloquent that Wade fancied she had spoken to him. A moment later he found himself beside her.

"What did you say ?" he whispered.

She showed no surprise at the question. Perhaps she, too, was caught by this illusion of eloquence.

"What did *you* say ?" she replied.

She withdrew her hand gently from Charles's arm ; and this action seemed to bring her nearer to Wade. He looked down at her. A wisp of black hair had escaped from the little astrakhan toque, and a passing trail of spider-thread clung to it.

## NEW SELF AWAKENING

"You are growing old," Wade said, wondering at the happiness in his voice. "There is silver in your hair. Permit me!"

And gently he took it between his fingers, presenting the almost invisible trophy to her.

"I've made you young again."

She looked at his hand, and from that most disconcertingly into his eyes.

"I hope I shall do the same for you," she said.

The half-playful, half-prophetic conversation was broken by a shout from Hilaire. He too, but in his own way, had been spellbound by the spectacle of the cavalrymen, and when suddenly the leader halted with upraised hand and a word of command that came faintly, a ghost-cry, down the ride, Hilaire could contain himself no longer. He snatched off his hat and held it aloft, startling the party with a shout of boyish pleasure. The soldiers heard it, too, for a chorus of cries broke from them, and an agitation of hands and pennons. Then for several moments long-distance greetings passed between the two groups of humanity, primitive and irresponsible signs of pleasure by mortals overawed by the stillness and silence of nature. . . .

This pleasant interlude finally roused Wade from his lassitude, and during the rest of the journey he talked with Wilson, attentive both to the conversation and to certain inward urgings towards a sense of adventure. Once he dared to turn round and find that Antoinette was watching him. He smiled at her, but her response was not immediate. Before returning the smile, she startled him with a look of fear and sadness.

After that he stared doggedly at the road, more disturbed than he dared to admit. The memory of her eyes and their momentary appeal remained in his mind, a nucleus for a train of thought leading him on to intimations of hope and renewed life. He had almost forgotten such mental activities were possible, and he settled down into himself, marvelling at this pleasurable folly.

Down through the royal forest he followed these thoughts, over roads patch-quilted with flaming leaves. The arches thinned overhead, sometimes exposing bunches and knots of mistletoe. The forest grew more and more drenched in colour as the air cleared. The madness, the sensuous glory of it, acted like wine upon the people in the car. All of them, except Charles, let the intoxication master them. He seemed to be slightly disgusted with nature for this almost riotous sentimentality, this orgy of latter-day splendours that were only inflated regrets. Miriam rallied him for his increasing gloom, and he mischievously asked her if she would like her shop<sup>1</sup> to be decorated in umbers and gamboge, gold and crimson.

Hilaire thought this too good a joke to be wasted, so he leaned out and repeated it to Wade, who nodded his head and smiled wearily. But he was far from being amused by this reminder of the shop. He asked himself if Antoinette knew of his refusal to collaborate with her brother. Was that the reason why she had looked at him

<sup>1</sup>Gregory Wade had been invited to collaborate with Charles in designing and decorating a millinery establishment in Paris, financed by Charles's brother, Hilaire de Vaudrac, and Josephine and Miriam Fletcher, the last of whom was to run the business. Wade had declined.

so reproachfully? If so, she was well justified, for at this moment he could not explain why he had turned the offer down. Were he asked now, would he refuse again? He believed—he dared to hope—that he might not; that this new warmth in his blood—this incredible sense of companionship and the establishing of relationship with at least one or two fellow-beings who could be trusted, would give him confidence to look back at the past, to rescue the technique associated with it, and would urge him to apply those powers to this new effort, this test so generously offered.

The mere contemplation of this possibility set his blood tingling. He asked himself what was happening, if at last some change were taking place where he had given up all idea of change. Time and treachery and the residue of self, these had been the only constants for years past, the one ringing upon the other a deadening monotone of despair and apathy. No, no; he could not believe in any other self, any other rhythm of existence. Time would tell out the tale; treachery was an accomplished certainty; and the residue was only too familiar; a death in life, a mockery of action.

[They approached La Genevraie.]

They were near the village, they had passed through it; they had turned to the left before a pair of wrought-iron gates with brick piers surmounted by stone balls; they had climbed a sharp hill that looked back over the hamlet and an endless line of poplars, and they stopped by a long, rambling cottage standing back from the cross-roads, shaded by two gigantic beech

## MODERN PROSE

trees, forerunners of the woods on the summit of the hill. . . .

[They entered the cottage.]

Antoinette approached with a glass of white wine which she handed to Josephine.

"Would you like to look at the cottage, Mr. Wade?" she asked. "Charles will take you. Do you like this room? It is his work."

Wade was able to praise without stint. He had been admiring ever since he entered. The first impression was one of surprise, for the exterior of the cottage had led him to expect low, dark rooms. But Charles had removed the ceiling and carried the room up through the two storeys. This, with the doubling of the upper windows back and front, gave light and space for the austere decoration; deep cream walls and ceiling, grey painted floor and woodwork, including table and chairs, neutral curtains and upholstery in a woollen material—polished steel slow combustion stove, and one large picture of the canal painted in enamels.

Charles waved his hand deprecatingly when Wade praised him, but he was pleased and almost eager in his offer to show the architect the rest of the house. Wade congratulated him again on the decoration of the four bedrooms and Antoinette's little boudoir.

"Where do *you* work here?" asked Wade, as they came down by a second staircase to a large kitchen behind the living-room.

"Oh, I never really work anywhere," said Charles, "but you may like to see."

He was gratified by Wade's inquiry, and the two men walked out into the garden up a brick

path bordered by box-edging still aromatic under the warm sunshine falling between the fruit trees. For the first time they were able to consolidate the tentative approaches hitherto made in the presence of other people; neither dared quite to trust the warmth, the delight, and surprise which he felt as he glanced shyly from time to time at his companion. But both were content to accept the miracle performing at this very moment in a setting so harmonious; a sense of arrival, of recognition, of gift-sharing and consolation, in a world of golden harvest.

Charles led the way down the garden through a clipped portal in a high yew hedge screening the vegetable garden and orchard, and out to a small clearing beyond the trees, bound by a four-foot stream slipping briskly towards the village.

Almost overhanging the stream stood an old brick outhouse, which Charles had re-tiled and fitted with a north light.

"This is where I work," he said, unlocking the door and following Wade in.

Again Wade had a sense of spaciousness and light. The brick walls were whitewashed, and the frame and ledge of the window facing along the stream and orchard-end were of plain oiled wood. There was no fire in the stove, and the place smelled confined and ivy-mantled through being shut up.

The visitor looked round, walked to the window and peered out at the water, the trees, the sunshine; turned round and noted the large easel, the well-used cabinet of drawers, the canvases stacked on the floor, the dusty table, the divan, and folding-chairs.

"Yes," he said gravely, nodding at his host and taking a cigarette. They stood opposite each other puffing in silence, both offering from time to time a countering glance of satisfaction.

"Very restful."

"You think so?"

"I do. It's a place one could work in."

"Why will you not work in it then, Mr. Wade?"

They were both startled by the abrupt question, and looked at each other almost with a guilty surprise. Wade knew at once that Antoinette also must have been told of his weak-minded refusal of Miss Fletcher's offer.

"I'm sorry," he said, pretending that he did not understand, "but it would be rather incredible to imagine high finance being carried on here." [This in reference to his secretarial duties.]

"Quite," said Charles. "But I had hoped that you and I were going to work together. You see, it would be an experiment for me. I have never in my life been able to work with anybody—being rather a spoilt child. Is it impossible, Mr. Wade, for you to reconsider your decision, whatever the cause may be?"

He spoke quickly, and Wade had no time to become defensive, even had he wished to. But he did not; he wanted only to respond as generously as this charming fellow had given; to justify the interest, the faith, the affection so openly offered. He could not understand the reason for this gift. There was no reason. The whole relationship was illogical, absurdly youthful and idealistic. But he welcomed it, recognized its



inevitability, its growth from that moment on the road to Paris when he put his mackintosh round the slightly pathetic and ridiculous figure.

He tried now to find words to reply, but his throat was constrained by the blood pulsating there. The battle! The battle was raging again—the dead were near; the hopes, the ambitions, the ideas; risen from the field where they had fought and retreated and fallen. He was almost ready now to risk another betrayal, to give himself with what remained of the half-forgotten innocence and delight and enthusiasm.

"It's very good of you, Charles," he said, his voice trembling. "I wish—I wish—I could explain. Life has let me down badly since the war. Something broke at last. I'm afraid of it—afraid of myself. There's no trust left in me, don't you understand? I have been trying to get away from all that—to cancel everything out—even my own work. There's no relief left there even."

He spoke with such an intensity of misery that de Vaudrac put out a hand as though to touch him.

"You say too much, perhaps, Gregory. You may have become wilful, determined to think life is over, the adventure done. But is that true? And if it is true, is it not common to everybody? I think that that terrible Bergsonian Duration betrays us. It is not people. They are only victims, too. I am younger than you; but I see now that Time is a drug, slowing down our instincts, blunting our reactions. It ought to be our ally, bringing us experience and accumulating wisdom and skill. But since our

experiment of living is determined between birth and death, we are poisoned by what should be our food."

Wade stood silent, looking on the ground. He had nothing to say. This sudden metamorphosis of the shy, half-derisive Charles nonplussed him. He wanted time to assimilate these arguments so obviously long-matured. He wanted to reconsider his estimate of the man as well as the value of what he offered. Meanwhile, here before him was the actuality, the person, a mystery, and a very disturbing revelation breaking upon his own life.

But before the frozen will could be brought to act in the face of this reality, an interruption came from outside. The door opened and Antoinette appeared.

She looked from one to the other, instantly aware of the depths into which they had plunged.

"You are both serious," she said. "Are you already discussing my plans for the hotel? But now is not the time, for we all need lunch, and Madame Mattay—but you have yet to meet her, Mr. Wade."

As neither of the men responded she approached them, and laid a hand on the arm first of her brother and then of Wade. They realized at once how close together they had been standing. Both, half-embarrassed, took a step back, so that Antoinette's hands dropped.

"What is it?" she said more earnestly, a little gleam of fear in her eyes. "What has happened?"

Her brother laughed.

"Toni, you look like the tragic muse. Nothing

has happened. I have merely asked Gregory why he——?”

“You will forgive him, Mr. Wade, I hope. You see, he is so used to having his own way. It is only when he is occasionally thwarted that he becomes like the rest of the family—eloquent and often violent.”

“Please let me consider it again,” Wade broke through her efforts to ease the tension. “I have not had time, Mademoiselle de Vaudrac; you must not blame me. It is a disturbing matter, and—and——”

He broke off, putting his hand to his mouth and fumbling at his lips with trembling fingers. Charles and his sister exchanged quick glances of concern.

“Well, Mr. Wade, why should you distress yourself?” said Antoinette, smiling at him. “I think, for one thing, we are all nervous with hunger. You have not even had your *vin blanc*. You, Charles, run to the house and tell the others we will set off at once.”

Charles went out, saying that he would bring Wade's wine. The situation was thus changed so quickly that the bewildered man stood, struggling still with the confusion and burden of his thoughts. Antoinette watched him for a moment, then again touched his arm, reminding him of her presence.

“You are very foolish,” she said; “very foolish.”

“I realize that.”

“Well, let us laugh about it. I think it is wise to laugh when you cannot understand, or when you are—afraid.”

He turned to her and took her hand in his.

"Is that true? Is it?" He spoke like a man drowning, crying to the shore.

"I don't know," she whispered, returning the pressure of his fingers. "But it is good enough—if you are afraid—if you have suffered and dare not look forward."

She looked up into his face, her own beautiful with compassion; her voice broken and rough with feeling.

"Isn't it enough, Mr. Wade, that you have come to a new country and have found a few people who would wish to value you at more than your own price? My brother Charles told me of that meeting on the road from Boulogne. I knew he was strangely interested—and I have been wondering about that because such interests are unusual with him. He is very—very old and civilized, very French, Mr. Wade. Such people are cautious; they do not give themselves easily. You can understand, therefore, that I was intrigued; that I wanted to meet you. And I found then that——"

He stooped, looking closely at her, his spirit hungering for the balm she was offering.

"What did you find?"

"I found that you, too, were very old, very civilized. Come now, Mr. Wade, you are foolish. Look, you are trembling again. You have been ill—for how long? Years, perhaps—maybe since the war? Was that it? You may care to tell me one day; but not now, my friend.—Mr. Wade, come along, you are starving, and I must introduce you to Madame Mattay's cabbage soup."

She led him by the hand from the studio, locked

the door, and walked beside him through the orchard, her arm lightly in his. As they passed under the yew archway she paused in the shadow, detaining him for a moment to listen to the laughter coming from the house.

"You can hear that the world goes on," she said. "You may as well travel with it. I think that is good statecraft, eh? Both my brothers have learned that—to care for nothing, to be afraid of nothing."

For the first time he looked at her with amusement.

"That's what Josephine advised, too." [A point of possible jealousy in Antoinette.]

She dropped his arm suddenly and walked on, then said over her shoulder, "You are not so civilized after all."

*The Apple of Concord.* 1935.

## VII

F. C. BODEN

### I. Wet Day : Chesterfield

[From a novel showing contemporary conditions in the Derbyshire coalfield through the experiences and reactions of a sensitive young collier.]

A WET west wind was blowing coldly over Wales, and the rain poured down the Pennines into the Derbyshire valleys, soaking the county from Glossop to Swadlincote. The hills of Watch-hill were lost in a clammy, rainy, mountain mist that writhed down the old Roman roads into the valley of the Rother and clung round the town of Chesterfield like a pall. The Rother itself bubbled and stank and sprawled round the edge of the town like the overflow from a sewer. The dull, grey midland sky hung so low that it seemed to touch the cock-vane on the twisted spire which stands very close to the railway station in Chesterfield; and the smoke and smell from factories, ironworks, tan-yards, knacker-yards, skin-yards, breweries, and potteries rose up to this dull, grey midland sky like the heavy breath of a sacrifice; and, this October morning, the rain poured into the streets and alleys, lashing the shop windows, running the gutters, and hissing down the drains as though it were glad to be gone.

A few bedraggled women huddled in shop door-

ways, eyeing the passing policeman in his dripping cape, and listlessly noting the approach of a butcher's van, which came splashing and jolting along the High Street. Then the clanging of a bell and the heavy grinding and screeching of metal signalled the appearance of the Bramptonward tram, and with a clutching of skirts and string-bags, a tightening of coats and ducking of heads, they were scuttling across the road and scrambling into the muddy red and yellow tramcar, settling themselves on the hard wooden seats, fumbling for purses, staring through the streaming windows, scanning the milk advertisements and the blacklead advertisements with which the interior of the tramcar was adorned, while the whole paraphernalia groaned and rattled past the post office, along West Bars, and so Bramptonward.

The market-hall clock chimed the quarter, and a shopgirl darted across the market-place, carrying a tray on which stood a few dirty pots. The piercing whistle of a shunting engine sounded at the far end of the town. The west wind drove the rain in thick, slanting lines straight at the windows of shops and banks and public-houses as though it would wash them as they had never been washed before.

Shopkeepers stared through their wet shop windows and sprinkled their shop floors with sawdust; a messenger boy, head over handle-bars, pedalled furiously against the wind along High Street, reached the post office, dismounted, reared his red cycle against the wall of the post office, and, shaking himself, disappeared through a panelled door. Within the post office a few

grey-haired old women were drawing their pensions, paid out to them by a sleek-haired young fellow who dropped each amount at the edge of the wire grille and withdrew his hand quickly. A strange, downy-faced young man who wore a very gay tie and dropped innumerable aitches. Each old woman, having got her money, shuffled across the draughty stone floor, pushed at the swing-doors with her thin, blue-veined hands, and lagged along High Street in the pouring rain; and the market-hall clock chimed the half-hour.

Then, up from the east end of the town, with the rain beating in his face, scurried a shabby, mackintoshed youth with a bulging canvas sack slung at his back and a bundle under his arm. His cap, turned back to front, clung sopping to his forehead, and the rain ran down his nose and cheeks on to his mackintosh, while at every few yards he piped in a thin, treble voice, "*Bird . . . early Bird . . . Bird.*" Up around the church he came with his "*Bird . . . early Bird . . . Bird,*" along the High Street, through the market-place, darting from public-house to public-house, in and out of the rain, the bundle under his arm growing smaller and smaller. Young men came to the doors of billiard saloons and whistled him as he went by. Others appeared at alley-openings and street-ends, received their paper, handed over a coin, and disappeared again. Along West Bars he went, his "*Bird . . . early Bird . . . Bird*" growing faint and fainter, till at last it was lost in the rain. The red and yellow tramcar came clanging back from Brompton, muddier and wetter than ever, and, above all,



tram and everything, with dark fingers on white face, the market-hall clock chimed the three-quarters. The policeman returned along High Street, hitched his streaming cape, stamped on the slimy cobbles, and then waved his hand to a greengrocer's lorry which was being braked down Gluman Gate, smelling of over-ripe fruit and petrol. The lorry swayed and creaked round the market-hall, tails of damp straw and rope hanging from beneath its dirty tarpaulin. The policeman lifted his cape a little higher round his neck, glanced at a dog that had stopped in the rain and was smelling the foot of a lamp-standard, and then squelched slowly across to Low Pavement and down South Street. A typist drew her hand across the window of an auctioneer's office and peered out at the rain-swept square. The dog abandoned the foot of the lamp-standard, crossed the road and vanished. Then, with a whir and a pause, the white-faced market-hall clock chimed twelve, and at that instant hooters and hammers and whistles on all sides joined in a shrill discordance which echoed from one end of the town to the other. Brampton, Whittington, Broad Oaks, Derby Road, each lent its hummers and whistles to the midday discord, and from the gates of factories, potteries, ironworks, and breweries men and women and boys and girls poured forth in their hundreds. Hurrying, hungry black streams which smothered the side-walks and overflowed on to the tram-lines. Hurrying, black-faced, greasy-faced streams which flowed down the main street, down side-streets, through the gaps between the houses, this way and that way, filling the town with a clatter and bustle,

a hurrying, a ringing of bicycle bells, which spread and died away as rapidly as it had begun, leaving nothing but the rain pattering in the streets, and the west wind blustering round the corners and hissing through the overhead cables. Chesterfield was at dinner; and, indifferent alike to dinner, to rain, and to everything, the market-hall clock again chimed the quarter.

## 2. Accident in the Mine.

The shift had not long been started, and Danny was waiting at the end of the level for the empty wagons to be brought up to him. Everything was very quiet, and there was no sign of the train which should have been there by then. The sweat trickled down his back and sides, even as he sat and occupied himself in polishing his lamp-glass with a fragment of paper which he found in the dust at his feet. Were those wagons never coming? That fool of a driver was probably playing about instead of doing his work, and he knew very well that the men at the coal-face would be waiting for the wagons. He sat staring down the level, but there was nothing there, only the darkness.

Then, as he watched, his lamp in one hand and the fragment of paper in the other, down in the darkness a light twinkled and jerked uneasily and climbed towards him. Whoever it was, he was trying to run up that narrow, cramped passage, and, as he climbed, Danny could see the dull white of his legs glimmering in the light of the lamp he carried. It was the driver for whom

## ACCIDENT IN THE MINE

Danny had been waiting, and he came up gasping, fighting for breath. The sweat ran down his deathly white face and dropped on his chest.

"Dan," he gasped, "has tha seen t'deputy?"

"No," Danny answered. "What's wrong?"

"Ernie Brady's buried," panted the youth as he bent again and scrambled off into the darkness.

"Ah'll have to find somebody."

Danny was on his feet in an instant and set off down the level as hard as the low, jagged roof would allow him to go. At the bottom of this level another tunnel turned off to the left, and leading into this were the gates, dark little passages going straight to the coal-face. Danny ran double along here till he reached the end gate. Ernie Brady worked here—up this gate. A big, jolly, red-faced man, who had a good word for every one and was liked by all. The thought of him lying buried was too awful for words. That very morning he had laughed and joked as they stood in the pit bottom together, and humorously remarked how ready for pay-day he was. Ernie Brady lying buried!

At the top of the gate, close to the old iron plate on which the wagons were twisted in to the coal-face, seven or eight crouching and kneeling men were smashing with sledge-hammers and wedges at a huge piece of stone which had dropped solidly from the roof, blocking the little tunnel and pinning the wretched man beneath it. The huge stone had wedged itself between the sides of the tunnel and was immovable, the only method of releasing the man being to smash it to pieces as he lay beneath it. The man himself, but for one of his feet, was completely covered by the

rock. Danny, carrying away the rock as it was smashed off by the men, saw this foot, saw that its clog was burst and split, with blood oozing between the torn leather. The sweat ran down him and he felt sick. No one spoke. The men worked like demons, smashing at the great rock. Sweat poured down their heaving ribs. Seven or eight nearly naked men, covered with sweat and coal-dust, smashing at a great rock with sledge-hammers. A few hand-lamps glimmered in the stifling, dusty air, and throwing the men's shadows on to the rock with which they were fighting like madmen. A jagged, ugly, great rock with a burst, bloody clog sticking out from beneath it. Dust and blows. Strained, sweating faces. The clang of the iron hammers on the iron wedges, the panting and the gasping; the thick, heavy air; the little lamps; the burst clog; the dust and the blows.

God, who men say art in heaven, these are Thy miners. These are Thy miners who go down into Thine earth out of the light of Thy sun. Hours are lengthened and wages are lessened in their honour. O help Thou Thy miners in their dreadful need, God.

These are miners working like madmen in a dark, stifling rat-hole. Swinging their hammers at a sullen rock which has fallen and covered a jolly, red-faced man, pinning him to the ground. Their arms work like flails, their breath hisses between their clenched teeth. Their muscles bulge and ripple in the light of their lamps. They are fighting for the life of a comrade. No one speaks.

Half an hour goes by, and piece by piece the

## ACCIDENT IN THE MINE

rock splinters. Now the man's legs are free; bare, bruised legs straddled limply in the soft dust. Another fifteen minutes and he is almost clear, lying there in the dirt among the shattered rock, the grime clotted round his mouth, and the blood trickling from his nose. The under-manager steps forward and lifts his lamp.

"Easy, men," he warns, "easy."

The man is clear now. They scratch away the last fragments with their hands and he is clear. They lean forward. He is lying on his stomach, and the broken shaft of his shovel is beneath him, snapped by his weight.

"Easy, men," warns the under-manager, "easy now."

They lift him over gently and he moans. He is dying. He has fallen on to the edge of his shovel, and it has cut sideways through his ragged waist-cloth into his stomach. It has gone in as far as the broken shaft, and the blood pours out as the under-manager releases it. The man moans.

He has been laid on the waiting stretcher, and one of the men kneels at his side and holds up his head.

"Wheer hurts thee, Ernie lad?" he asks huskily.

The man is beyond speech. The blood wheezes in his throat and his head sags. He is dead. The white-faced youth who had broken the news to Danny is cowering against the side of the tunnel, sobbing like a child. The men put on their shirts and trousers, Danny and the white-faced youth carrying the men's coats and bottles, and the weary, subdued little band set out for the pit bottom. The shift has knocked off, as it always

does at such times, and they go stumbling along the narrow tunnels, the blood welling from the gash in the dead man's stomach with every jolt of the stretcher.

It is a long journey, the dead man is heavy, and the men are worn out. Many times they set down the stretcher and snatch a few minutes' rest; the ponies, with their drooping heads and big, gentle eyes, standing quietly beside them, just as though they know.

In the pit bottom a boy of fourteen catches sight of their burden and faints, crumpling up into the sludge between the rails. Two or three men pick him up and lift him to a seat—clumsily made from two pit props. The dead man is carried into the little office which has been cut out from the solid rock in the pit bottom, and here he is roughly bandaged and covered with an old blanket.

It is soon over. The swift ride up into the blinding glare of day. The waiting ambulance and the low conversation. Then it is over, and everything is very still and quiet for such a time of the morning. The screens are silent, and the pit bank is deserted but for a few sparrows, chattering up among the dusty girders. A man crosses the pit yard and disappears round the corner of the blacksmith's shop. A train rocks by, hurtling up the main line towards Nottingham. Then everything is still and quiet. The pit buildings stand black and deserted in the bright morning sunshine. The pit has knocked off in respect for the dead. It is over.

Danny never forgot this. For weeks afterwards he dreamed of the dying man lying face down—

## ACCIDENT IN THE MINE

wards among the shattered rock. Then gradually the dreams ceased and his sleep was as sound as before. But he had never seen a man killed before and he did not forget. The summer woods still wore green up Linacre way, and the sun burned on the water as it always had done, but now there was a difference. Under the beauty of wood and water lay a dreadful reality, and the wind tossed the branches in not quite the same way. There were faint notes of mockery in the song of the lark, mockery for the grime and squalor and helplessness of his mates and himself. Mockery for the ugly houses and the mean streets in which their lives were spent. Mockery for their blind, uninformed endeavours, and the clearer the mockery, the more the wood and the water and the larks drew him to them. Somewhere among these things—among the leaves or the ripples—lay the clue to the reality beneath them. It lay not among the screaming, grinding colliery screens, nor down the huge, wet, brick-lined colliery shaft. It was among the leaves and the grass and the water ripples, and he sat out many a summer evening in these woods; eyes half closed, full of dreams and longings, which were always pierced by the stark facts of the mine, and melted away into utter loneliness.

*Miner.* 1932.

## VIII

### ROGER DATALLER

#### 1. Water in the Mine. Period 1816

[The first passage is from a novel of mining life in South Yorkshire, 1816, about a public-spirited collier, Holiday, whose spare time is given to pioneer work in education. The second shows the author quitting his job as timekeeper in a pit to take up an adult education scholarship at Oxford ; and is from a fragment of autobiography. The third, from another book of personal recollections and experiences, this time as a W.E.A. tutor, gives the childhood story of one of his class students.]

WILSON greeted his assistant without enthusiasm. He nodded a flick of tallow from the tiny plume of light on his forehead. "We're still at it," he grumbled, eyeing the dripping water-tubs.

"Keeping pace?" asked Holiday, and the overman scratched his ear.

"Just agate. But what does that mean? We've had a pretty dry day or two! That's the reason. God knows what will happen if a sup o' rain comes. What did weather look like when tha came down?"

"Doubtful enough," replied the other. "Warm and thundery."

"If them ponds brim up wi' floods we'd better be puttin' checks in," said Wilson. "It'll swill down here like a sink."



## WATER IN THE MINE

"Any word from——" and Holiday cocked his head in the direction he judged the Court to be. He did not complete the sentence.

"Nowt," answered Wilson laconically. "He's got some guests in now, so they say—heard at t' Grafton last night, an' I 'spect it's true! Sir James Rondale wi' a mountain o' luggage and a couple more. He'll have none time for considerin' pit. . . . Tha's better go round straight away and see what tha meks on it this mornin'. I'll stay here a bit and look after this delivery."

Holiday left him, turning up the main jinny. He was beginning to nourish an increasing affection for the overman. He was dependable, and of the full freemasonry of the mine. You could trust Wilson.

Alone on his rounds his confidence increased, and presently extended to the workings as a whole. It was much easier (he recognized) to nourish apprehension of danger in the full body of the sunlight than in the underground restriction of the mine. Now as the familiar galleries opened before him, the establishment of timber, and so much evidence of industry along the lines of transport and of ventilation, he found it possible to grimace hardily at his fears, and to presuppose an ultimate victory. Flooding, after all, was a common problem in every mine, a difficulty to be adjusted. With adequate pumping (and a newer type of steam pump could be worked at Higgett's as well as elsewhere) the situation might be saved. But (snag number one) no pump had been ordered. And (snag number two) Mr. Brailsford yet lingered in Hull. His brow clouded in the

darkness. At all events the agent would be returning soon, and he was far too keen a business manager not to press for an immediate pumping. Yes, there was a hope. Meanwhile . . .

He worked his way along the gallery, remotely reassured by this line of argument, when a few feet beyond the first "fault" he dropped sharply into deep water. He ground his teeth and drew in a low, hissing breath as the cool rings of the surface ran up to his knees. A golden halo ahead, where a trap-door boy was posted at his task of transmitting corves, and Holiday waded slowly towards it. This was Ronny Marvel's station; and the lad, having built for himself a squat little tower of grey bind, was perched upon it an inch or two above the surface of the water. Holiday greeted the boy cheerfully: "As snug as a bug in a rug—eh, Ronny?"

The boy turned his pale features towards the overman. His teeth chattered and his thin hands knotted and unknotted nervously. "I am glad ye've come, mester," he stammered simply.

"Why?"

"I—I'm frettened!"

The answer emerged in a thin whisper. "Frettened?" repeated Holiday calmly, incredulously. "What art thou frettened on, Ronny? Thou's been down pit long enough not to be frettened o' t' dark. Tha's a big lad now, tha knows. Is it mice?"

"It's watter," blurted the boy. "It comes up creepin'—creepin'. An' it frettens me!"

Holiday laughed reassuringly, hoping that this hilarity would not appear a trifle strained. "Who's been talkin'—eh?"

## WATER IN THE MINE

The boy inclined his head vaguely. "Some on 'em," he announced.

Holiday nodded. "I thought so, the fooils!" And he wagged his finger. "Na, look here, Ronny—tha listening?" He looked the exacting pedagogue for a moment.

The boy nodded silently.

"There's naught for thee to worry about. Does ta hear?"

Again the boy nodded.

"And tha knows," continued Holiday, "that when I say a thing I mean it. Doesn't ta?"

The boy licked his lips. "Yes, Mest' Holiday."

The man patted the slim shoulder. "Now, I'm looking after thee. It's a promise, that! Stop wheer tha are an' don't get thysen too wet, or tha'll be havin' a cowl i' thi heead. An' then tha'll be talkin' down thi dooas!"

The boy smiled.

"You hear then? Tha in my charge, an' I'll see tha comes to no harm."

"All right, Mester Holiday."

"That's all right," said Holiday, moving on. "Now I'll have a word wi' the men down yonder—bye-bye. And remember what I've said to thee."

As he passed through the door, and took measurement against the sweating wall, he could see that the water had dropped a good inch since yesterday. "The gormless rattles!" he muttered to himself, his mind still bearing upon the loose-tongued colliers blabbing in the apprehensive ears of the boy beyond the wooden barrier.

In the outer world the rain descended—tor-

rential, unceasing, swathing the whole countryside. It sizzled upon the newly moulded metal at Stalker's; it splashed greyly from the tall balustrade of the Folly, marking the grass at its foot with the mathematical line of its dripping. It drummed upon the coppice leaves, and ran in streams down Tolgate hillside and High Street, making runnels in the roadway, and coalescing at last with the yeasty torrent in the valley. Within the orchard it dripped from clustered cherries. Julia Rigby, opening the window, eyed the grey veils in the process of beating down the evanescent green of the pea-lines, and watched absently the guttering spout as it drained the eaves to the black barrel alongside. Sir Bracey and his guests with cards, and early candles lit, hearkened to the muffled drumming beyond the lozenged windows of the lounge where was the consolation of port and sherry, the flicking of cards, and the solicitous attention of the discreet Mercer. Hannah drew the windows against it, jealous of her dimity curtains; and at length splashed across the yard under a burst umbrella to feed voracious fowls. In the shed adjoining (though she did not know) Job Swallow bent a pair of mordant eyes upon it, the squire's crop still stinging across his shoulders, the sudden glint of gunfire, the violet shadows and crystal sunshine of the sierras in his mind, with the memory of Temperton's green uniform. Gunfire—and the rain.

The rain fell upon the chapel building; unwavering shadows in the sombre precincts; and across adjoining fields the haycocks sank beneath its weight. The horses of the coach were steaming beneath the play of the rain, a tiny cascade

## WATER IN THE MINE

of water dribbling from the painted roof, as the vehicle halted outside the "Grafton," where the landlord, lonely for the moment, had been projecting thin blue tobacco smoke into the sodden street.

"Rain, rain, goo away!" (chirruped the children through a hundred doorways). "Come another washin' day!"

But the rain chose not to hearken.

Labourers drenched under sacking straggled in from the fields, wiping their glistening foreheads with a swift movement of the hand.

At the fish-ponds, swift rings raced down the weedy overflow; and on the body of the water, where dim shadows moved furtively in the depths, a myriad circles interposed, successively fading, successively renewed.

It was late when Holiday started for home, his measuring accomplished, but with a further ominous lifting in the galleries. The calculation that the workings had pushed into the fish-pond pillar was now proved beyond doubt; and Wilson, greatly daring, had promised to lay this fact before his master next morning.

The rain had diminished somewhat; a thin drizzle fell, and through it moved hurriedly a figure from one of the houses down the hill. He halted. "Aye, Mest' Holiday," came a voice. "I've been waitin' for thee." It was Mrs. Marvel, the mother of the boy with whom he had been in conversation earlier in the shift.

"What is it?" he asked.

She clutched her shawl together beneath her chin, emphasizing anxious features and eyes. "It's our Ronny," she said. "He hasn't come

hooam. I'm that worried about him. I thought perhaps you could tell me something. Has he come out o' t' pit?"

"That I can't say, Mrs. Marvel," Holiday answered. "I haven't clapped eyes on him for an hour or two. Are you sure that he isn't playing about somewhere?"

"He'll none be playin' i' this rain," she answered dully. "Besides, he allus does come straight hooam. He should ha' been out bi six. I don't know what to do. His tea's waitin'. Is anybody workin' ovver?"

"We've got a few down at the pumps," said Holiday. "But I didn't know that Ronny was staying with them. He might be. Very likely he will be," he added comfortingly. "Perhaps Wilson will have set him on."

The woman hovered. "Do you think that? I wish I knew. I do wish I could get to know."

"Look here," said Holiday suddenly. "I'll slip down myself and see. I'll find out for you."

"I don't like to send you back," she muttered, "at shift end an' all. You must be tired."

"That's all right," he rejoined. "It's not above a step for me, and it'll put your mind at rest. Now don't you worry."

"Thank ye," she said simply. "Thank ye."

Holiday left her, retracing his steps to the pit. All the boys should have drawn up long ago; and although he had not warned the woman to that effect, he was certain that Wilson would not have called upon the frail figure of Ronny Marvel to assist with the extra pumping. His heart sank as he re-entered the gates, and struck the signal for the descent. "The young fool'll be

## WATER IN THE MINE

larking round somewhere," he murmured. "The quietest looking are the greatest cautions when it comes to a point." But he was hardly reassured. It was not in the character of the boy, as he remembered him both in the workings and at the school, to behave in such a fashion.

He bumped into Blacker at the bottom, and the eyes of the foreman lit up with a sudden eagerness. Had Holiday arrived to take him off?

"Any boys in the pit?" asked Holiday curtly, and the other shook his head.

"Men are opening traps theirsens," he answered. "All lads out an hour ago." He stood dully, his arms pendant, a figure of genial futility.

Holiday stood for a moment indecisively. "Young Marvel hasn't returned," he observed quietly, "an' yonder's his mother waitin' at top, worritin' her heart out about him. I wonder if he's down yet . . . somewhere?"

Blacker shook his head. "Never seen him, nor heeard nowt. I reckon I should ha' seen him."

Holiday made a slight gesture. "Very well. All the same I think I'll push on to the twelfth trap and see if he's still there. You never know."

"Has it finished rainin' yet?" asked Blacker, who had hung his steaming clothes before the fire.

"Not quite," said Holiday curtly, and lighting his candle at the brazier, he left the murky bottom and pushed up the main level. He was trembling for what the twelfth trap-door might reveal.

At the "fault" the flood had risen by at least another three inches, and he dropped into it with a sudden hiss of apprehension. The water

struck stone cold, for while his garments had not been allowed to dry, the natural heat of his body had begun the process. The slight air current blew chilly along the surface. If the water rose much farther, the whole of the workings would have to be closed. And he sighed angrily as he waded forward, conscious more than ever of the baffling presumption of ownership. Sir Bracey Higgett's sanction! By what virtue?—by what prerogative?

He floundered badly at the sixth cross-gate, barking his shins, and for a little while extinguishing his candle. Luckily he kept his tinder-box in a waterproof receptacle, and after a good deal of manipulation, he nourished a spluttering flame upon the wick, and with this inconstant illumination proceeded on his journey.

So far he had encountered only deserted galleries; and nearing the trap he raised his voice, calling upon the youngster by name. But there was no answer. The golden rim of light that should have glowed above the door-boy's head was absent. The faint whistle of wind down the gallery and the soft plash and gurgle of his own steadily moving feet were the only sounds of any moment. Occasionally a rat plopped in the water, swimming in silence; but that was all.

He waded slowly on, casting his light upon the face of the waters, where the flame, dancing duplicate, was broken by the swirl and eddy of his movement. "Ronny!" he shouted. "Ahoy! Do you hear? Ronny! . . . Marvel! . . . Marvel!" The little mound of bind, which the boy had occupied as a protection against the rising water, was empty. Holiday took a step forward,



## LEAVING THE MINE

laid his hand upon the thick twine loop of the door, serving for a handle, and pulled it open without difficulty. "Ronny! . . . Ahoy!" he shouted through the aperture. He pushed the door farther, intending to march through, but some impediment, obviously not that of water, restrained him. He gave a second and still more determined thrust; and then with a sudden cry he was hovering over a bundle very near the surface. He raised himself as near full height as the limitation of the roadway would allow. With trembling fingers he set his candle in the place cut out for it. Then he stooped again, and hauled the bundle, sodden and dripping, to the pathetic little throne of grey rubble. It was Ronny Marvel sure enough.

And Ronny Marvel was dead.

*Uncouth Swain.* October 1933.

### 2. Leaving the Mine

The underground office had never appeared particularly cosy, but now in these last few moments he was very loath to leave the battered cupboards and the snugly circumscribing walls. Still, time was running out. Already it was half-past twelve.

He strolled out of the office, and placing his shoulder against the great wooden door in the corridor, thrust against the cushion of air that held it firmly in place. The door gave reluctantly—and instantly smacked to behind him. In other days this door had always seemed to clap

upon its framework with a sinister racket, symbolic of the mine. In this farewell hour it was only a wooden structure clattering a little foolishly as the air current swung it in again.

Ahead, some fifty yards or more, the pit-bottom lamps were shining. He could see the tiny cages halting for a moment, and then plucked upwards in the void by an invisible thread. A train of corves ran to the chairs, a dark glittering serpent winding from the inmost recesses of the workings. Methodically the bottom men were cutting off the head of that serpent—three corves in the upper deck, three in the lower—but the body never lessened. Powerful, insistent, it crept upon the cages. Day after day the bottom men were lopping off the serpent's head. They would be doing this Monday morning sharp on the stroke of six. It was difficult to conjure a Monday in which one would not stroll into the dust and clangour of the pit bottom, there to swap a word with the onsetter and to register the output.

A brisk succession of sounds drew him to a standstill. It was the flat effect of the pick blade biting into the coal where the wall ran in the shadow. That would be Renfrew cutting out the new pick storeroom. He ought to have a word with Renfrew.

The collier was working with his back to the lamplight, a filmy green electric one. A ghoulish shadow slid across the "face" as his blade assailed the wall ahead. At every blow a shower of splinters fell with a sound like that of breaking glass. He turned as he saw the timekeeper. "Hallo," he said, shivering, "it's mortal cowl

## LEAVING THE MINE

i' this draughty place. You've got to keep a singlet on. When art goin' to the university?"

"I'm finishing to-day," answered the timekeeper. Ought he to make some demonstration of regret? In the dark hollow the coal threw off faint noises like titterings. He thought of Oxford, the sunlight on the meadows.

"Well, tha'll be glad enow to be rid of a dusty hoile like this."

"It will be a great change." (How difficult it was to find appropriate words, and he liked Renfrew.) "Of course, I'm sorry I'm leaving."

"I know—I know," grinned the collier. "Good luck to thee—and gi' me the time before tha goes."

There would be time to push in a word with the horsekeeper if one contrived to hurry, then back across the bottom again. In the warm air of his little den the stableman was surveying his stock of lubricating oils. "These'll last another three months," he announced, with a half turn of his head. "Longer ner me, perhaps. Have ye ever tried a bit o' this horse's cough paste?" He scraped his finger round a battered tin and sucked it. His tongue ran on. "Your time's getting short now. You'll not be sorry to put your checks in?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the timekeeper. He sniffed lingeringly. There was always something heady about the air of the stables—hay, oats, sawdust, and the odour of the animals. A brisk, unfailing conviviality. He turned with a start. Two colliers clattered by, the first of a thickening flight. Their dudleys were slung, shorts drawn

bulkily through their belts at the back. He knew that the shift was ending. He followed slowly.

In the pit bottom there was a fairish cluster. Pushing forward, the colliers filled the chair so that there was no room left for the timekeeper. "Next time," said the onsetter. "This'll be thy last journey, I reckon?" What sinister implications lay behind the friendly phrase? One remembered a marble tablet not a mile away, set up to commemorate one tragic breaking of a winding rope. How if these strands should not sustain the winding? Of what avail the promise of Oxford?

With a slight hiss of grease the cage slid down before their eyes. He stepped inside. Three others followed, and a fourth came running lightly—an Irish deputy—swearing good-humouredly as the onsetter rapped the bell. Then the chains upon the roof of the chair clanked solidly, and the floor pulled at one's feet. They were off, and up. . . . The slimy walls were straking downwards . . . mounting . . . mounting . . . with a slight elastic play in the long steel rope that made the cage floor bounce beneath their feet. Up . . . up . . . the rope snatched petulantly. They were drawing near the surface now—the light greyed in. There was a faint glow of sunshine, a warmer burst. Then the pit-head platform came abreast, and slid beneath their feet. The banksman thrust in the "fallers." This was the end.

He was mounting the hill away from the colliery. Even now it was impossible to believe that he had severed all connection with it. There it lay in a shallow fold, its twin chimneys throw-

ing off a lengthy scarf of smoke, its outer works compact as those of a battle cruiser. As he raised his hand in a gesture of farewell there seemed (in that moment) nothing extraordinary in the illusion that all these rolling hills might flow with the movement of waters and the trim chimneys and surrounding body break loose suddenly, and with a long streamer of western smoke sail over the green undulations to the farthest horizon. But the colliery still stood, rigid and self-contained, as he took the turning in the road, and it fell away from sight.

*A Pitman looks at Oxford.* February 1933.

### 3. A Mining Girlhood

She touched the photograph diffidently, with a certain tenderness—the photograph in which, with hair drawn from her forehead and much beribboned, she was wearing her frilly Scotch plaid dress for the first time. Her eyes were the same intent, determined ones—a somewhat lighter grey than at present—her lips with the same rather impish compression. The rest of the family stood round about her. Her mother, whom the villagers always termed “lady,” because of an invariable neatness of deportment, stood a little in the rear, a thin golden chain falling over her best satin dress, her hands laid over little Lucy’s shoulders for comfort. Two other girls, also resplendent in Scotch plaid, and their only brother, were ranged against a background of brick, with the lower angle of a window showing.

The corners of the photograph were yellowing towards the centre (at some stage of removal it had been torn across and lightly gummed together), and though she seldom looked upon it now, always the same magic obtained. It was the low end of the colliery; the credential of her childhood.

There were other buildings at Low End, not quite so domestic as that set out in the photograph—a signal-box beside the railway embankment, the square stone stables, the little ambulance cabin, and the dark screens of the colliery itself, not a stone's throw distant. But the cottage had always seemed a trifle isolated for all that. Now, looking back a generation, it was the garden that did it, she decided, a green outwork encircling the whole house. And instantly the rich scent of the wallflowers invaded her nostrils; she saw the long coal-dusty path to the gate, and the stone stairs (forgotten until this very moment) ranging the side of the cottage to a disused loft above the outhouse.

Her father was a horseman to the company, dark, bewhiskered, silent by nature, and so tall indeed that he was compelled to stoop every time he entered the doorway; her mother, brisk, *petite*, she remembered much more clearly when she thought of her hands, the slender white hands (with the single gold band) that, at intervals of caring for her family and her man, would droop upon the keys of the piano in the parlour—though that was only seldom. . . .

From her earliest years she had never been able to conceive the world without a burning tip somewhere in the vicinity. Her youthful idea of heaven

usually included that accretion. The tip at Low End loomed over the railway line, a film of smoke and vapour perpetually oozing from its many runnels and interstices. To her it was always an object of romantic excursion. With Fred, her brother, and Doris, her elder sister, she would scramble across the metals to the grassy base where one collected a beautiful, splintery red ash with which to brighten the garden path. But the tip brought more than garden decoration. It was the repository of high adventure and unutterable terror. On one occasion, following the nimble heels of Fred along the sulphurous slopes, she had fallen through the crust, approaching shoulder deep. The thin ash was warm and acrid about her, and she remembered the panic that filled her heart as she found herself sinking still farther. But the others had managed to lug her out, and with fingers, pocket handkerchiefs, and spoken comfort, to make her a little more presentable. They assured her that mother need never be told. They would play outside a little longer for her benefit. The winds would blow about her clothing, and cleanse it of all impurity! When, however, hours later—suspiciously hushed and chastened—they stole into an evening meal, the children were not surprised to find their mother's nostrils instantly twitching. "Whatever, child——?"

And it was all out. . . .

The colliery stables, too, the children appropriated as part of their territory—dusty heaped-up bottles of straw in the loft—and the ground floor in particular, where two magnificent draught

animals, Black Bess and Sandy, were accommodated.

Bess she remembered as the highly intelligent mare, in the habit of lifting a catch upon the half-door in order to enter Sandy's stall. . . . There was an impish evening when the children were left alone, and they decided to lift the catch of Bess's door in order to see what would happen. They had huddled together as Bess ranged out ; but the bared teeth, and the squeal of rage with which she greeted Sandy, transfixed them with terror. Flickering mane ! Flashing hoof ! lurching and crashing of great bodies against the standing partition, all hurried the children through the garden, home, where they locked the door against their father's return, and cowered with fingers in ears to shut out the hideous echoes. When at last he did arrive, they watched him, trembling with apprehension, as he donned his working coat and passed out to the nightly bedding of the horses. Half an hour later he returned, bent his great height to a seat, and sighed heavily. "Sandy's gone an' broken a leg," he announced. "Bess must ha' lifted the catch again."

The children maintained a guilty silence.

The next day Sandy was shot, and from the upper window—much too ill to go to school—she peeped at the execution. There was dad strolling about, handling the rifle restlessly, for he had a great affection for the horse ; and there, beside the manure pit in the centre of the yard, was poor old Sandy limping heavily, the broken leg trailing. The second stableman moved the horse around the manure pit . . . once . . . twice . . .



and it seemed to her that the horrible perambulation would go on for ever. She saw that Sandy was alone. Then—crash!—the firearm exploded, and Sandy fell loosely beside the manure.

After that the reproachful body lay stiff and uncovered awaiting the knacker's cart. The alarming feature of it all was that you were compelled to pass within a yard or two of the strange chestnut carcass in order to gain the high road. Sobbing, she had cried all her fear to her mother, and she remembered the sharp, reproving hand that was waved in her direction. "He didn't hurt you alive, nor will he hurt you dead!"

But mother didn't—couldn't know . . .

And Sandy appeared in dreams for a long time afterwards: Sandy blocking the garden path, Sandy on the high road, Sandy refusing admittance to school, Sandy climbing the stairs to the bedroom.

*Oxford into Coalfield.* 1934.

## IX

### HERBERT READ

#### Boyhood on a Yorkshire Farm

[From the autobiography—up to the age of ten—of a poet, art critic, and æsthetic theorist of the “modernist” school. The setting is an East Riding farmstead.]

WHEN I went to school I learnt that the Vale in which we lived had once been a lake, but long ago the sea had eaten through the hills in the east and so released the fresh waters, leaving a fertile plain. But such an idea would have seemed strange to my innocent mind, so remote was this menacing sea. Our farm was towards the western end of the Vale, and because all our land was as flat as once the surface of the lake had been, we could see around us the misty hills, the Moors to the north, the Wolds to the south, meeting dimly in the east where they were more distant. This rim of hills was nearest in the south, at least in effect ; for as the sun sank in the west the windows of Stamper’s farm in the south caught the blazing rays and cast them back at us, continually drawing our eyes in that direction. But we never travelled so far south as those hills ; for the Church and the Market, the only outer places of pilgrimage, lay to the north, five or six miles away. By habit we faced north ; the south was “ behind.”

I seemed to live, therefore, in a basin, wide and shallow like the milkpans in the dairy ; but the even bed of it was checkered with pastures and cornfields, and the rims were the soft blues and purples of the moorlands. This basin was my world, and I had no inkling of any larger world, for no strangers came to us out of it, and we never went into it. Very rarely my Father went to York or Northallerton, to buy a piece of machinery for the Farm or to serve on a jury at the Assizes ; but only our vague wonder accompanied him, and the toys he brought back with him might have come, like sailors' curios, from Arabia or Cathay. The basin at times was very wide, especially in the clearness of a Summer's day ; but as dusk fell it would suddenly contract, the misty hills would draw near, and with night they had clasped us close : the centre of the world had become a candle shining from the kitchen window. Inside, in the sitting-room where we spent most of our life, a lamp was lit, with a round glass shade like a full yellow moon. There we were bathed before the fire, said our prayers kneeling on the hearth-rug, and then disappeared up the steep stairs lighted by a candle to bed ; and once there, the world was finally blotted out. But I think it returned with the same suddenness, at least in Summer ; but the waking world was a new world, a hollow cube with light streaming in from one window across to a large bed holding, as the years went by, first one, then two, and finally three boys, overseen by two Apostles from one wall and adjured from another, above a chest of drawers, by a white pottery plaque within a pink-lustre frame, printed with a vignette of an

angel blowing a trumpet and the words, PRAISE YE THE LORD.

Sometimes the child's mind went on living even during the darkness of night, listening to the velvet stillness of the fields. The stillness of a sleeping town, of a village, is nothing to the stillness of a remote farm ; for the peace of day in such a place is so kindly that the ear is attuned to the subtlest sounds, and time is slow. If by chance a cow should low in the night it is like the abysmal cry of some hellish beast, bringing woe to the world. And who knows what hellish beasts might roam by night, for in the cave by the Church five miles away they once found the bones of many strange animals, wolves and hyænas, and even the tusks of mammoths. The night-sound that still echoes in my mind, however, is not of this kind ; it is gentler and more musical—the distant sound of horse hooves on the high-road, at first dim and uncertain, but growing louder until they more suddenly cease. To that distant sound, I realized later, I must have come into the world, for the Doctor arrived on horse-back at four o'clock one December morning to find me uttering my first shriek.

I think I heard those hooves again the night my Father died, but of this I am not certain ; perhaps I shall remember when I come to relate that event, for now the memory of those years, which end shortly after my tenth birthday, comes fitfully, when the proper associations are aroused. If only I can recover the sense and certainty of those innocent years, years in which we seemed not so much to live as to be lived by forces outside us, by the wind and trees and moving clouds and

all the mobile engines of our expanding world—then I am convinced I shall possess a key to much that has happened to me in this other world of conscious living. The echoes of my life which I find in my early childhood are too many to be dismissed as vain coincidences ; but it is perhaps my conscious life which is the echo, the only real experiences in life being those lived with a virgin sensibility—so that we only hear a tone once, only see a colour once, see, hear, touch, taste, and smell everything but once, the first time. All life is an echo of our first sensations, and we build up our consciousness, our whole mental life, by variations and combinations of these elementary sensations. But it is more complicated than that, for the senses apprehend not only colours and tones and shapes, but also patterns and atmospheres, and our first discovery of these determines the larger patterns and subtler atmospheres of all our subsequent existence.

Our dominion was really four-fold : the Green I have just described, and then three other almost equal squares, the one to the left of the Green being the Farm outhouses, a rectangular court of low buildings enclosing the Fodgarth, or fold-garth, and two others to the south of the house, the orchard to the east, the garden to the west. Each province was perfectly distinct, divided off by high walls or hedges ; and each had its individual powers or mysteries. The Green was the province of water and of fowl, of traffic and trade, the only province familiar to strangers—to the postman and the pedlar, and the scarlet huntsmen. In Winter we made the snow-man there ; in

Summer avoided its shelterless waste. On Mondays the washed clothes flapped in the wind, but for the rest of the week it was willingly resigned to hens, ducks, geese, guinea-fowls, and turkeys, whose discursive habits, incidentally, made it no fit playground for children. The pond was more attractive, but because of its stagnation it could not compete with the beck not far away. I remember it best in a hot Summer, when the water dried up and left a surface of shining mud, as smooth as moleskin, from which projected the rusty wrecks of old cans and discarded implements. Perhaps it was a forbidden area; it serves no purpose in my memory.

On the south side of the Green were two familiar shrines, each with its sacred fire. The first was the saddle-room, with its pungent clean smell of saddle-soap. It was a small whitewashed room, hung with bright bits and stirrups and long loops of leather reins; the saddles were in a loft above, reached by a ladder and trap-door. In the middle was a small cylindrical stove, kept burning through the Winter, and making a warm, friendly shelter where we could play undisturbed. Our chief joy was to make lead shot, or bullets as we called them; and for this purpose there existed a long-handled crucible and a mould. At what now seems to me an incredibly early age we melted down the strips of lead we found in the window-sill, and poured the sullen liquid into the small aperture of the mould, which was in the form of a pair of pincers—closed whilst the pouring was in progress. When opened, the gleaming silver bullets, about the size of a pea, fell out of the matrix and rolled away to cool on the stone

## ON A YORKSHIRE FARM

floor. We used the bullets in our catapults, but the joy was in the making of them, and in the sight of their shining beauty.

The blacksmith's shop was a still more magical shrine. The blacksmith came for a day periodically, to shoe or reshoe the horses, to repair wagons and make simple instruments. In his dusky cave the bellows roared, the fire was blown to a white intensity, and then suddenly the bellows-shaft was released and the soft glowing iron drawn from the heart of the fire. Then clang, clang, clang on the anvil, the heavenly shower of ruby and golden sparks, and our precipitate flight to a place of safety. All around us, in dark cobwebbed corners, were heaps of old iron, discarded horseshoes, hoops and pipes. Under the window was a tank of water for slaking and tempering the iron, and this water possessed the miraculous property of curing warts.

In these two shrines I first experienced the joy of making things. Everywhere around me the earth was stirring with growth and the beasts were propagating their kind. But these wonders passed unobserved by my childish mind, unrecorded in memory. They depended on forces beyond our control, beyond my conception. But fire was real, and so was the skill with which we shaped hard metals to our design and desire.

The fourth kingdom, the Foldgarth, was the animal kingdom. We usually entered it from the north corner of the Green, and here on the right were the main cowsheds, and the most familiar part of this complex of buildings. Morning and night, and most often by lanthorn light (perhaps it

## MODERN PROSE

is only the Winter scene which is impressed on my memory), the cows were milked in a glow and atmosphere which is for me the glow and atmosphere of the Nativity. The patient beasts stood in their stalls, exuding the soft, slightly sickly smell of cow breath; a girl or a man sat on a three-legged stool, cheek against a glossy flank, and the warm needle stream of milk hissed into the gleaming pails. At first it sang against the hollow tin drum of the base, but as the pail filled it murmured with a frothy surr-surr. Here I learnt my first bitter lesson of self-limitation; for try as I would I could not learn how to milk. To manipulate the teats so as to secure a swift and easy flow of milk demands a particular skill; I never acquired it, though my brothers, younger than I, seemed to find no difficulty. This was my first humiliation in the practical affairs of life; another which I might mention here was an inability to make the kuk-kuk noise between the tongue and palate which is the proper sound to urge a horse on gently. These failures in trivial things loom much larger in childhood and affect us much more deeply than any backwardness in learning manners or facts, for they reflect on our physical capacity, and that is much more real to us than any mental power.

Along the western side of the Foldgarth ran a line of higher, double-storeyed buildings. The first was a big hay-barn, open to the rafters, with the pigeon-house built in at the gable end. It was a favourite playing-ground in wet weather: we could make giddy leaps from one level of hay to another; we could burrow into caves and hide



completely in its scented warmth. A door at the other side of this barn led to a circular building, with a grinding mill in the middle and a circular track round which a horse could drag the mill-beam.

Then came various sheds for fodder and implements, and over these, approached by stone steps at the end of the building, and outside the Foldgarth, was the granary—a long, dry, sweet-smelling loft, with bins of golden wheat and stacks of oilcake, and a store of locust-beans which we ate when we were hungry. A machine for crushing oilcake stood against one wall, and in this one day I managed to crush my little finger. I fainted with the pain, and the horror of that dim milk-white panic is as ineffaceable as the scar which my flesh still bears.

The other two sides of the Foldgarth were occupied by pigsties and cowsheds; the middle by a steadily steaming morass of urine-sodden straw known as the Mig Heap, the infinitely precious store of manure from which the land recovered some of the strength given forth in corn and pasture. The acrid stench of this heap, never unpleasant to any one brought up with it, pervaded the whole of the Foldgarth. The pigeons flocked from roof to roof. An inquisitive calf would lift its head over the low door of its stall. A scurry of hens, an occasional grunt or squeal of pigs, the running of a rope through a ring in the stables: these were the only sounds that disturbed the day's peace, until the men returned from the fields with the weary horses, and the Foldgarth was filled with the clatter of hooves on the stone sets, with the whistling and hissing of the men over their grooming.

## MODERN PROSE

On the southern side of the Foldgarth, some of the stables opened on the outer side, into a lane whose other side was the high wall on the north of the vegetable garden. Here lived the hunters, beautiful pedigree horses which were the pride of the Farm—lived in a cleanliness and comfort which put them in a class apart, half-way between humans and animals. I fancy that the fortunes of the Farm depended far more on these splendid pampered darlings than on the normal crops and cattle. It was a great day when they were paraded in all their glossy splendour before some horse-dealer, and a bargain struck. But sorrow must have been mingled with satisfaction when they left us, and a farm is, indeed, the scene of many sad farewells: pet lambs and ducks stolen away to go to the market with the rest, leaving a broken-hearted child to weep the day away until some consolation is found.

Beyond the Foldgarth lay the Stackyard, looking like an African village, especially after the harvest, when it was stored to its limits. The stacks were of two shapes—circular and rectangular—with swelling sides and neatly thatched roofs. The ridges of the rectangular ones were braided with osiers; the round ones were finished off with a fanciful panache of straw. Birds sheltered under the narrow eaves, and would dart out at our strident approach. One Summer evening something not bird nor bat fluttered among the stacks; the Farm was roused to excitement and the winged creature finally netted. It was a rare Death's Head moth, for which some collector paid the fabulous sum of five shillings.

## ON A YORKSHIRE FARM

That such riches could lurk in a Stackyard was a new portent. We learned that the Death's Head moth was fond of the potato-flower, and the season never afterwards passed without a vain hunt among these despised blooms.

The great festival in the Stackyard was threshing-time. Late one afternoon we could hear the chuff and rattle of the engine and threshing-machine far away on the highroad, and away we would race to meet it. The owner of the engine, Jabez by name, was a great hero in the eyes of the children. He was a small man with a little twinkling face and a fuzzy black beard. He would stop his rattling train and take us up into the engine cabin. I love to this day that particular smell of hot steam and oil which was then wafted to us. With amazement we watched Jabez push over his levers and set the monster in motion. With more chuffing and much complicated shunting the machines were steered into position for work, and then left shrouded for the night.

Very early the next morning we would hear a high-pitched musical hum coming from the Stackyard, and it was with difficulty that we could be made to eat any breakfast. Then we would run across the Green and find round the corner the most exciting scene of the year. The engine stood before us, merry with smoke and steam; the big fly-wheel winked in the sunlight; the bright balls of the revolving "governor" (Jabez had taught me the technical names) twinkled in a minor radiance. Jabez was in the cabin stoking the glowing furnace. The big leather belt swung rhythmically between the fly-wheel and the threshing-machine. Two men

## MODERN PROSE

on the top of a stack threw down the sheaves ; two others cut them open and guided them into the monster's belly ; the monster groaned and gobbled, and out of its yammering mouth came the distracted straw ; elsewhere emerged the prickly chaff, and below, into sacks that reached the ground, trickled the precious corn. A cloud of dust and chaff swirled round everything. As the stack disappeared, and approached ground-level, we were armed with sticks and the dogs became attentive and expectant. The last layer of sheaves was reached ; out raced the rats which had made a home in the bedding of thorns on which the stack rested, and then for a few minutes the Stackyard was an abode of demons : dogs barked, men and children shouted in a lust of killing, and the unfortunate rats squealed in panic and death agonies. Sometimes we found a nest of newly born rats, and then we were suddenly sad.

I think this festival used to last two or three days ; it was our only contact with the Machine God. I suppose we were dimly aware of the railway six miles away, and must have travelled on it, for I know that once or twice we went to Scarborough ; but for some reason I have no vivid memory of these excursions, nor of anything associated with them. They were not lived, but pushed without roots into the soil of our existence. One curious experience, however, remains with me, and it may as well be mentioned here ; it is the first of several instances in my life of which I remain incapable of asserting that the experience was of the dream-world. My reason tells me, in this case at least, that it must have been a dream,

## ON A YORKSHIRE FARM

but the mind does not necessarily assent to its reasoning. I "appeared" (as we say) to walk down the cart-track that led along the top side of two or three fields towards Peacock's farm; I climbed on to the gate that separated the last field from the highroad, and as I rested there I was terrified by the sudden onrush of a large steam-roller, travelling northwards. It was distinguished from ordinary steam-rollers (which I had no doubt seen at work on the roads) by the fact that the boiler rested on an enormous bellows, and as the engine roared onwards, these bellows worked up and down and so seemed to throw up through the chimney a fiery column of smoke, steam, and sparks. This apparition, which came to me perhaps in my seventh year, remains in my mind to-day distinct in every detail.

I do not think that I was more than usually subject to nightmares (if such this was), but one, which I fancy belongs to a common form, is also remembered by me with peculiar vividness, though it is difficult to describe. I am laid as in bed on a bank of clouds. The sky darkens, grows bluish-black. Then the darkness seems to take visible shape, to separate into long bolsters, or objects which I should now compare with air-ships. These then point themselves towards me, and approach me, magnifying themselves enormously as they get nearer. I awake with a shriek, quivering with terror. My Mother hears me and comes quickly to comfort me, perhaps to take me back with her to sleep away the sudden terror.

Almost in the middle of the Farm was the fox-covert—a piece of land of perhaps four acres,

## MODERN PROSE

thickly covered with gorse and scrub, hedged with hazel trees. Twice in a season the Hunt met at our house. They assembled on the Green—the Master, the Kennelman, and several others in their scarlet coats and peaked caps, the farmers and ladies in hard billycock hats. The hounds moved in a compact mass, their upcurved tails swaying rhythmically. When the Meet was present, they moved off to the fox-covert, and always without much difficulty started a fox. My Father rode one of his beautiful hunters; my Mother had her pony. At first we children went on foot as far as the Covert and saw them take off, and piped our tally-ho's if we caught sight of the fox. We heard the huntsman's horn as they sped across the fields, waited until we could hear it no more, then went home to wait until the weary hunters returned. But when I was about seven I was given my first pony, and then rode away with the hounds—my first hunt ending in the middle of a hedge which my impetuous pony had taken too rashly.

At the first kill at which I was present I had to be 'blooded.' The severed head of the fox was wiped across my face till it was completely smeared in blood, and I was told what a fine huntsman I should make. I do not remember the blood, nor the joking huntsmen; only the plumed breath of the horses, the jingle of their harness, the beads of dew and the white gossamer on the tangled hedge beside us.

I left for a boarding-school, far away from these scenes; my childhood, the first phase of my life, was isolated: it grew detached in my memory

## ON A YORKSHIRE FARM

and floated away like a leaf on a stream. But it never finally disappeared, as these pages witness. Instead, as this body of mine passes through the rays of experience, it meets bright points of ecstasy which come from the heart of this lost realm. But the realm is never wholly lost : it is reconstructed stage by stage whenever the sensibility recovers its first innocence, whenever eye and ear and touch and tongue and quivering nostril revive sensation in all its child-godly passivity.

To-day I found a withered stem of honesty, and shelled the pods between my thumb and finger ; silver pennies, which grew between the fragrant currant-bushes. Their glistening surfaces, seeded, the very faint rustle they make in the wind—these sensations come direct to me from a moment thirty years ago. As they expand in my mind, they carry everything in their widening circle—the low crisp box-hedge which would be at my feet, the pear-trees on the wall behind me, the potato-flowers on the patch beyond the bushes, the ivy-clad shed at the end of the path, the cow pasture, the fairy rings—everything shimmers for a second on the expanding rim of my memory. The farthest tremor of this perturbation is lost only at the finest edge where sensation passes beyond the confines of experience ; for memory is a flower which only opens fully in the kingdom of Heaven, where the eye is eternally innocent.

*The Innocent Eye.* 1933.

## X

E. H. YOUNG

### A Mountain Hike

[Part of a short story about two youths, William Poltreven, selfish, living for the moment, and Alfred Sparkes, pompously conscientious, who go for a holiday on the coast together. Inland lies a mountainous tract. Largely through William, who all the same scorns to bother about ways and means, they set out on a hike over this dangerous region. The end of the tale is startlingly tragic—see *New English Short Stories*, Cape, 1935.]

HAVING set out on the adventure, Alfred was dogged to pursue it to the end, but his heart failed him at moments when he realized that he was surrounded by innumerable trackless hills and spurs of hills, great spreading shoulders, masses of earth such as he had never seen before, stone-strewn valleys, stretches of flat country from which the heather had been burnt, leaving blackened stalks like skeletons with appealing hands; dark earth ready for the peat-cutter, oozy pools of discoloured water, brighter ones aswim with reeds and reflecting patches of blue sky, heroic little tarns, alone and dauntless.

There were steep grey rocks streaked across with sparkling quartz, and shoots of scree streamed from the base of some small cliff until level ground arrested their descent. Sheep fed everywhere



## A MOUNTAIN HIKE

and cried distressfully, stones scattered by their feet made a tinkling as of bells, and watching over everything that moved or waited with their own patience were the hills. Wise, they seemed, and humorous, but strangely callous to any fate: the sun shone on them and turned their green to yellow, their purple heather to a noble red, the changing bracken leaves to bronze, but they had seen all the seasons so many times, been buried under snow and lashed with rain and sleet, and sunned upon again so often that they never made a sign, nor did the toiling figures of the two friends move their indifference except to a sort of gentle scorn for human labour. Some conception of this aloofness reached Alfred's practical mind.

"We're simply helpless," he muttered. "Helpless," and he turned to look about him at the sea of hills. The salt friendly sea in which they had bathed so freely without a thought of intrusion was now so distant that it had lost reality, but those solid green waves were always threatening to break, casually and without spite. . . .

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, they were fed and weary, and presently they both fell asleep. Even Alfred, who knew it was a waste of opportunity, soon relaxed and felt himself carried off into that best of all oblivions when the body is still half-conscious of its ease, when the warmth of the sun steals into the brain and the little sounds of wind and fretted grass seem to be a part of a man's breath. Alfred lay heavily and slept steadily; William's muscles twitched for a time and then he lay very still, while sheep cropped and cried near them and, far away in the

## MODERN PROSE

next valley, a stream talked endlessly to the hills. A couple of great birds rose with strong, beating wings into the air, hovered marvellously and called out to each other as if to ask if these sleeping men were carrion, but they did not approach: they whirred and wheeled, beat the air, swooped and floated, uttering their harsh cries, and vanished towards the precipice where they had their nest.

All through the afternoon the young men slept, and when they woke the sun was slipping towards the west; the stream still babbled, the sheep still ate and complained with the bitter melancholy of their speech, but the shadows on the hills had changed. William stirred first and sat up. He was rather cold and bewildered. Where had the sun gone? He rose in fright to find it reassuringly high in heaven, but the place was different. It seemed to him as desolate as his conception of the life of God. Something had happened while he slept. Alfred, in a huddled attitude, looked like a dead man. Except for the prone figure and William's own hurried breathing there was no sign of human life, though the life of sheep and birds and water, of the hills themselves, seemed to press closely against the young man. He felt queer; he did not know what he was going to do, or what was going to be done with him. The hills no longer made him giddy: they soothed him as a cradle soothes a child, but he wished the water down there in the valley would stop talking, or that he need not listen so intently. Now and then a slight shifting of the wind carried off the sound, and William was conscious of a wonderful relief, but the next

## A MOUNTAIN HIKE

breeze brought back the babbling, louder, more insistent, saying something which he could not understand. He was sure that he would be obliged to understand it in time, because he knew that the stream would never stop. He put his fingers to his ears, but he could not go about the world like that, and he dropped his hands. He was angry when he glanced at the peaceful Alfred, untroubled by any sound. He had half a mind to leave him sleeping there and go to find the stream, but at that moment Alfred moved and sat up with a jerk, his hand on his watch, his mouth pursed in concern.

"By Jove, it's six o'clock, William, and we're not at the top yet. Extremely careless of us to sleep so long. Dear dear! Dear me!"

"Don't talk so much," William said. Alfred's fussiness, the speed with which he grabbed their belongings and stuffed them into the knapsack, were so foolish and unnecessary up here, where such things did not matter; and they certainly did not matter. What mattered was the babbling message of the stream, but since at the top of the mountain it might be beyond earshot he followed Alfred the more willingly. Alfred was going as fast as possible over the rough ground; his solid legs in their thick stockings plunged through the heather; in the steeper places, his hands, impeded by the walking-stick, grasped the strong tufts, and he sneezed violently when the dust from the flowers assailed his nose. The sight of him clambering thus, earnest but comic, set William laughing spitefully.

"You're like a monkey up a stick, Alfred!" he shouted, and he flung his own stick away. His

## MODERN PROSE

thin but muscular arm sent it high and far, and it whirled through the air to disappear without a sound, as though, out of sight, some waiting hand had caught it in its descent. He stood still, somewhat disconcerted and a little fearful, to hear, a moment later, the voice of Alfred calling urgently, "Now, don't get playing about, William. That top's a long way farther than it looks."

"Damn you," William muttered, he knew not why. "Damn you," and he seemed to be echoing the louder tones of that persistent stream.

Alfred was right about the distance, but when, at last, they reached the crown of rocks which had been their goal, they did not look down, as they had hoped, on a placid lake with a few homely cottages by the shore and the promise of human fellowship and food and beds; they saw a desolate and a narrow valley threaded by a white stream and contained by a mighty precipice of rock. Far off, beyond the barriers of the hills, they saw a pale glint of the sea, but there was no house, no lake, no friendly, trodden road.

"This is extremely awkward," Alfred murmured.

The ground below them dropped steeply with untold dangers farther down, there were those forbidding rocks on the other side of the valley, and Alfred anxiously produced his map and compass. He looked up at William with a troubled face.

"Let's start," William said.

"And how," Alfred went on, "are we to get up that precipice?"

"We shall find out. There must be a way."

"For goats," Alfred said.

## A MOUNTAIN HIKE

"We shall find out," William repeated, and he snapped his fingers and thumbs together.

There was something heroic in Alfred. He packed up his traps again and set off down the steep hillside without another word, though to him this had begun to be a terrible adventure. Their place of descent was chosen, out of their ignorance, at haphazard, with the idea that the most direct would be the quickest, but it was thick with heather and hidden stones and holes, so that their muscles were perpetually strained to resist a fall. Slowly the objects in the valley grew plainer to the eyes, but attainment seemed no nearer.

He watched Alfred's stout, determined figure with enmity in his eyes. What was Alfred doing here? he asked himself, because it seemed that the stream had first asked him. This was not the place for Alfred with his best authors, and his noble opinions, and his thick legs—no, it was no place for him. William remembered all the things he most disliked in the friend plodding on ahead, particularly the sleekness of his body when it was bare. This was his own place, not Alfred's, and he wished he could be left alone with the hills and the crying of the water. The stream was unhappy about something, and its voice had longing in it, or distress. Perhaps it was angry with Alfred, and it might be angry with him too, for it was he who had brought Alfred here. The stream knew that; he was sure the stream knew everything, and he was afraid.

They went on in silence.

"I believe I should get on better if I sat down," Alfred said, and for some time he worked his way

## MODERN PROSE

downwards in that posture, with the heather bursting up around him and scratching his ears. All William could see of him was the head with its serviceable tweed cap bobbing above the green and purple spikes like a watchful hare, but William did not find Alfred funny now: he was making too much noise, spluttering and grunting and sometimes singing to keep up his spirits, and more than likely the stream would think he mocked it.

By the time they reached the valley and ground which, in comparison with the mountain-side, was as smooth and level as a lawn, darkness was drifting over the lower slopes of the hills and the opposing precipice was of an essential blackness.

"We can't get up there to-night," Alfred said, and his voice had a faint chirrup of dismay. "We shall kill ourselves if we try."

He looked round in a bewildered hope of finding shelter, and at the same moment he discovered that William was not near him. He was sitting on a stone beside the stream, and his head hung as though he was very weary. "I shall have to think for that boy as well as for myself," Alfred decided, and immediately he became brisk and resourceful. Shouting a word of encouragement to the drooping figure which had gathered round it the melancholy of the coming night and the solitary place, Alfred set his wits and his tired legs to work. Heather would make a warm bed, but it should be heather in the lee of a large rock, and seeking this, he almost fell against a half-ruined hut, so much the colour of the rocks themselves that his eyes had not distinguished it. A sheep, scared to a frenzy, rushed out, bleat-

ing, as he entered, and the place smelt of its presence, but Alfred thought a dirty ruin better than the possibility of a chill, and he went in triumph and cheerfulness to William.

"It's all right. Come along. I've found you a roof for your head, and I shall be able to restore you to your mother."

"Go away. Go away, where I can't see you, or hear you, or remember you!" William's face had the venomous look of those who are mortally afraid. "Go away, I say."

"Very well." Alfred got up, struggling against the weight of trouble which seemed to push him down. Soon he found a heather bed which smelt of honey and bore him up and kept him warm. From it he could see his friend and the white frothing of the stream, and he meant to keep watch faithfully through the night, but his eyelids drooped with an increasing heaviness, the long day of exercise and powerful air had an effect on him which even his double anxiety could not resist. Soon he was carried off into a marvellous peace, and in that peace he slept until he was awakened by the cold and heard once more the talking of the water. Then his tired eyes sought William through the darkness, found him still sitting there, and closed again, and so, until the dawn came, he slept and waked in turn, and sometimes he saw William sitting like a statue, sometimes standing or walking by the stream. Each time his figure became clearer and more tragic, but Alfred pinned his faith on the healing of the sun. He saw it rise slowly, with the deliberation of a masterly performance, and the sight, from its delicate beginnings, almost tentative yet

## MODERN PROSE

deadly sure, until its maturity, when it blazed with colour and dyed the hills, held him forgetful of his worries and fatigues. Suddenly brave and energetic he shouted to William to look towards the east, and as the boy obeyed, a shaft of light reached down to him like a finger.

When they set off, it began to drizzle, and by the time they had overcome the scree, all bright with parsley fern, the drizzle had become a steady fall.

"Yes, the day began too well," Alfred said. "Dear me, I wonder if we had better go on?"

Beautiful drifts of mist, like grey birds, were floating overhead, and the mountain down which they had made their painful way last night was hidden from them by a thick fence of rain.

"Dear me!" Alfred repeated, and clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

The grey stones of the scree were gradually blackened, unexpected little streams oozed from the rocks, there were sounds of tinkling and gurgling on every hand, and the stream fuller each minute, now invisible and now seen, was shouting messages with a great voice. William's jaw dropped and there was a hunted look again on his face. Alfred's own fear drove him into jollity.

"'Oh, who will o'er the Downs with me?'" he sang. "Now, William, let's show what stuff Britons are made of!" He started up the steep heathered slope. "Every bit of heather's a shower-bath. Hope there's no rheumatism in your family." He scrambled and pulled and puffed. "We may be wet, but we shall be warm."

William followed swiftly, overtook Alfred, and kept ahead of him. Now and then he paused to



## A MOUNTAIN HIKE

turn and look from his friend's wet red face to the valley blotted out with mist, where the stream was roaring and crying out, full of anger and desire. Delicate little sounds also came to their ears—tricklings through the moss, gurglings under stones, the footsteps and the cries of sheep. And for Alfred those footsteps and cries only served to make the desolation more complete. Through the swishing rain, William's face, quite pale in spite of his exertions, kept turning like that of some harried animal, an animal who might snarl and spring on his pursuer, and Alfred had an uncomfortable, unaccountable feeling that he and William were hunting one another. The heather stalks were slimy under Alfred's hands; the ground slipped and slithered under his feet; his wrists began to ache with cold and effort. On the two went, meeting rocky obstacles in their way which were conquered by William with a natural ease, by Alfred with flounderings and dreadful clutchings, and sometimes they had to avoid such places with a flanking curve. It was William who led now, very quickly, without hesitation, leaving Alfred far behind, tired and growing shaky.

"Steady on, old boy!" he had to shout at last. "I've got more to pull up than you!"

"I'll wait for you," William said.

At that moment, as they both paused for breath, the wind parted the mists and the stream showed itself white and furious to the two perched on the hillside, and the voice was the voice of a demon.

"Come up to me," William said with an urgent quiet.

## MODERN PROSE

Alfred was looking down, and a horror of the depths took hold of him. He knew that in a moment he would be giddy, and it was like a miracle that William should speak so soberly; after all, it was William who was the strong man; safety lay in trusting William who was not afraid.

Alfred faltered, tried to drag his eyes from the sight they hated, and failed to do it. "I can't," he said, through shaking lips. If it had been possible to see the whole slope of the hillside to the scree, he might have found his position bearable, but fifty feet below him was the flat top of one of the steep places they had avoided, and thence the eye sprang without relief to the valley and the crying stream. The air seemed to rock with that noise and the movement of the rain.

"I can't move," he said faintly. "I—I shall have to stay here."

"Come on," William said with a kind of concentrated venom, and a great resolve enabled Alfred to face the heather to which his trembling hands were clinging.

*The Stream.* 1934.

## XI

JOHN COLLIER

### Mr. Fatigay and the Chimp

[A chapter from a satirical novel in which Emily, a chimpanzee, who has learnt to read highbrow literature, falls in love with the African village schoolmaster, Mr. Fatigay, an Englishman. She goes with him to England on a visit to his fiancée, Miss Amy Flint, a bright young thing. Emily finally proving much more human than Amy, Mr. Fatigay marries her. The whole book is a telling skit on the vanity and heartlessness of the modern world.]

Behold ! behold, the palace of his pride !  
God Neptune's palaces.

NOT long after this there was a great bustle in the schoolmaster's pleasant house. Bags were dragged out and packed, live stock and garden appurtenances disposed of, crates filled with curios and souvenirs. Blacks thronged the garden path and sat all day upon the steps. Every time Mr. Fatigay appeared at a window he was cheered to the echo ; every time he appeared at the door he was swamped by clustering natives, thick as flies on a roadside fragment, who first loudly, and I believe sincerely, implored him not to go, and then, on his smiling persistence, pressed upon him yams and what not.

" Here," they cried, piling these up into his arms, " let us exchange mementoes."

And off they went, calling out his praises ; one carrying a pair of old shoes, another a collection of used razor blades, yet another a rain-spoiled pith helmet, and a fourth that fine piece of earthenware which had stood beneath the wash-stand. They gave him all their old rubbish and he gave them his, and every one was content.

The school children marched up with flags and music, and performed a masque in his honour on the lawn. In this, the seven deadly sins were mimed with such energy that the pair who enacted Anger were carried gasping to the infirmary, and Gluttony was sick on the spot.

"Good-bye," they cried at the end. "Bless our dear teacher. Hurrah ! No more school ! Hurrah ! Character rather than Intelligence ! Hurrah !"

"Good-bye, dear friend," said the headman of Boboma, who shortly after the execution of Loblulya (his late and trying wife), had been told by the spirit that he must return to the village.

"Good-bye," replied Mr. Fatigay, "I suppose you don't want to get married again before I go ?" For he would have liked to see the whole world married.

"No, thank you," said the headman. "After my last dear wife . . . I shall never marry again. Mais," he continued, unconsciously quoting George II., for he had worked in his youth in the French Congo, "j'aurai des maîtresses."

"Good-bye," cried all the servants, their faces so wet and smiling that one instinctively looked for coal-tar rainbows there. Not only the good and faithful ones, but the idlers, thieves, and

## MR. FATIGAY AND THE CHIMP

wastrels among them, even Topsy, the fat cook, found now that they loved Mr. Fatigay and wished he would not go.

"Good-bye," said an old tin can, from which, Emily remembered, as she caught sight of it lying forlorn upon a dunghill, she and Mr. Fatigay had had some delicious pineapple for her name-day tea.

"Good-bye," murmured Emily's heart to it. "And good-bye, village. Good-bye, Arcady. Good-bye, summer. Good-bye. Good-bye."

And the jungle opened upon its track, parting like the waters of the Red Sea as they rode away. Mr. Fatigay's ardent heart went on before them, in alternate cloud and fire, on this journey through what wilderness he knew not, to a Canaan other than that of which he dreamed.

Half a day's journey away lay the rotten little pier-head, blistering in the mud, where, once a month, a tiny hiccuping river launch put in an appearance. Sitting on the shaky planks, surrounded by either twenty-five or twenty-seven packages, they stared into the grey heat-haze where the river curved, and the leaden trunks and streamers of the trees, prolonged by reflection in the shining slime, muddled the distance as if by a frowsy bead curtain. Space and time hung about the place like grey shoddy garments, infinitely too large for man and his shrunken activities here.

After a long wait, a mean and weakly chug-chug was heard, and the dirty launch had suddenly appeared to mark where the trees were, after all, divided. Emily stood up in her skimpy cotton frock and watched its approach with

fluttering heart. This then was the steamship, a major factor in Tennyson's dictum, "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." She was glad she was not going to Cathay.

Its poor appearance, however, did not damp her excitement, for the splendours of the civilization she was now going to visit had been too strongly impressed upon her in her reading to be negatived by the shortcomings of a little African mail boat. Nor were they entirely cancelled by the prospect of a life of unsatisfied emotion, which was all she had to look forward to.

"For," said the sensible little creature, "mind is still mind, whatever may befall the heart; perhaps the more so. I will visit Madame Tussaud's and the Tower of London, and become as well-informed as any of my sex, if not as happy. I will drain each new experience to its dregs, as far as is consistent with proportioned and virtuous conduct, and since my life is to be a tragedy, I will see to it that it does not descend into mawkishness through a deficiency of intellectual content."

And, reminding herself that this was her first journey by water, and the beginning of a new life, she looked keenly about her as she tripped up the gangway.

"I hope," she thought fervently, "that I shall not be sick."

Soon the packages were all stowed away on board, and the captain, in accents which boredom rendered as flat and colourless as the mud-banks among which he sailed, declared that all was serene. Ropes were unhitched, the engine strove and stank once more, and they were off. If Mr. Fatigay had been less absorbed in his

own thoughts at the moment, he might have noticed that the tall fringes of the jungle were festooned with the innumerable dark faces, like gigantic plums, of a host of chimpanzees, mostly Toms, who had come to look their last on this Helen of the jungle. Darkest Africa would be the darker for her going: this she could not doubt, who saw it written so unmistakably in those crowded mournful faces, so simple and sincere.

Day after day the little boat ticked its way through the uneasy stupor of the Congo, under high bluffs where vultures sat, soaked in metallic light, on the gallowsy branches of the dead trees; over shallow places where reeds, swarming with filthy larvæ, poked up from the mud like mangy hair; past sand-banks hideously alive with the scuttling panic of crocodiles; past squalid settlements where nothing stirred but a scream, or, worse still, a laugh, and on down to where the great estuary began, and the port sweltered behind the roll of hot flashing breakers at the ocean bar.

The boat on which they were to exchange for the sea voyage was due to sail on the day of their tardy arrival, so that Emily, who had been looking forward to her first sight of a town of size, had to content herself with an inspection of the quays, and with but a distant glimpse of white buildings and tin-roofed shacks dancing in the quivering air. Her disappointment, though, was soon forgotten at the sight of the crowded ship, and at the thought that now she might come into contact, more or less as an equal, with the sort of people among whom she was to live.

It was, as she afterwards discovered, through

the generous consideration of her master that she was not disappointed of this pleasure also, and forced to spend three weeks of the voyage penned in a narrow cage between decks, in disgusting proximity to crates of serpents and the reeking young of the greater cats.

Mr. Fatigay could not endure the thought of his sensitive pet languishing in such hateful confinement, and his desire for her presence beside him, no less than his fears for her health, had prompted him to apply to the Company for a special ticket, that she might share his state-room on the voyage. To this they had agreed, providing that she was to be suitably attired, and that he would take all responsibility for her behaviour, and that the full passenger's fare should be paid. As to her good conduct, he had no doubts at all, for she had proved so apt a pupil in even the subtlest points of the etiquette in which he had instructed her; besides, he knew that a sweeter-natured creature had never drawn breath, than Emily. The fare had been a serious consideration, for his savings amounted to no great figure, and he had an instinct that Miss Amy Flint, his bride to be, would be ill-content at any rash expenditure on his part. But here, he felt, Amy would agree that he was justified. As for dress, it had been a simple matter to purchase a plain cotton frock and a shady, if unmodish, sunbonnet from the village store.

Emily was pleasedly conscious of her outfit, as, holding tightly to his strong hand, she accompanied him through the bustle and life of the promenade deck in search of their cabin. She wondered what all these tall bronzed men and



elegantly costumed women would say to one another about her, and she thought it possible that the simplicity of her dress, and the modest way in which she bent her head as she passed among them, might commend her to their good graces as one who was not inclined to presume nor to give herself airs because her talents had raised her to a *milieu* so widely different from the condition into which she had been born.

"Who can that dumpy little brown creature be?" was what they actually were saying. "The one going along with that shabby fellow there. One of these women anthropologists, I suppose."

And as such they accepted her, taking the silent nods and smiles with which she acknowledged their formal good-mornings as resulting from the shyness and reserve of the dowdy student, until, a day or two later, when Mr. Fatigay, on being asked if his wife was not a great traveller, since she stood the sea so well, replied in surprise:

"My wife? Excuse me, but I have no wife. At least, not yet. . . ."

"Then who, pray," demanded his interrogator, for, being the wife of a Cape magistrate, she considered herself responsible for the morals of all who met her, and not for those of the lost legion who did not, "who, pray, is that lady in the sun-bonnet over there, who, I am told, shares your stateroom, sir, where, for some reason, she always takes her meals?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Fatigay. "That! That's not a lady: that's Emily."

Then suddenly aware of his interlocutor's puffed

and purpled visage, he made haste to add, "That is to say, she's not what you might call a woman at all. She's my pet chimpanzee."

"Oh, really!" cried the lady, the storm which had been gathering on her brow now melting into an expression of astonishment and interest. "Really! In that sunbonnet, and the way she walks, every one has taken it for granted she was your wife. How extraordinary! Please call her over here, I must have a good look at her. Steward! Some nuts."

And Emily was summoned to make her curtsy before this proud wife, and to listen to the bland and patronizing comments made upon her appearance and manners.

At once the news spread like wildfire round the promenade deck. Cries of "Good Heavens!" and "Oh, mamma, ain't she cute! Won't you buy her for me, mamma?" were heard on every side, and soon the embarrassed chimp stood nervously in the middle of a ring of grinning faces.

It says much for her native good humour, and for the training she had received from her protector, that she lost neither her temper nor her outward self-possession, but making a stately inclination or two in acknowledgment of the attention bestowed on her, she gently pressed her way through the crowd and sought the quiet sanctuary of the stateroom.

"You must not mind her shyness," explained Mr. Fatigay courteously. "She is very unused to the society of a large circle of white people."

"Bring her out. Go on, man! Bring her out," shouted the young subalterns and planters going home on leave. "Will she smoke a cigarette?"

For two or three days following this Emily's life was little better than a torment, for no sooner did she venture on deck to take a breath of fresh air than she was surrounded by an inquisitive crowd, to whom the least and most ordinary of her actions was a source of loud amazement. When, in the hope of turning aside their derision, and even of enlisting the friendship of two or three of them who appeared more intelligent than the rest, she ventured to nod approval of some remark they made, or handed them, for example, the Conrad she had secured for herself, with one finger marking a fine descriptive passage, while with the other hand she indicated the appropriate sea around them, they would merely burst out into crueller laughter than before.

"Ah!" thought the chimp, "though it is bad enough to be mocked on account of unfashionable clothes, and perhaps superfluous hair, these are, after all, admittedly defects. But why should they laugh at me for my understanding? Perhaps they think it ridiculous for one of my sex to aspire to culture. It would be different if I were a Tom."

With this, she drew into her shell a little, and as there was small entertainment in the sight of even a chimp sitting hour after hour staring at a book, the fickle interest of the voyagers soon slackened and was diverted. A seaman was discovered to be a woman masquerading in man's clothes, and a stewardess to be a man in woman's. A fancy dress ball was promptly organized, and in the general excitement the chimp soon ceased to be an object of remark.

"We must go to the ball," said Mr. Fatigay,

## MODERN PROSE

and Emily's heart bounded with joy. After all, she was young and spirited, nor could she, any more than the rest of her sex, resist the peculiar thrill of the prospect of appearing in the most bewitchingly suitable costume, and among an admiring crowd.

"Perhaps I might go as Carmen," she thought, "if only I could beg a Spanish shawl from some one, and a red rose to hold in my lips." And she looked anxiously to where Mr. Fatigay was eating a dish of Irish stew, to see if there were any bones in it which might serve as castanets.

"To-re-a-dor!" The quickening strains stirred in her mind, making her blood tingle as if they had been struck up to hail her entrance into the ballroom.

"The question is," said Mr. Fatigay, "what shall one go as?"

"Or perhaps Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat." True, it was, strictly speaking, a part for a blonde, but, after all, there were tiger lilies. And a white sheet, pinned here and there, would do for the basic part of the costume. "And I might carry his shield," she thought, "and be polishing it! In a way it wouldn't suit me as well as Carmen, but supposing he realized that he is my Sir Lancelot, and she his hard, exacting Guinevere!"

"Of course, I make a very good pirate," murmured her protector.

"Or supposing I went as Ruth," she thought, "dipping my morsel into the vinegar. A smile or two, bestowed generally, would reassure the company that no slight was intended. . . ."

"By Jove! I've got it," suddenly cried Mr. Fatigay, slapping his thigh with a crack like a

## MR. FATIGAY AND THE CHIMP

pistol shot. "Where's that green velvet smoking-jacket mother sent me? It'll be just the thing. I'll go as an organ grinder, and I'll get the stewardess to run up a little suit for Emily, out of some red stuff, and she can be the monkey. Perhaps we'll get the prize."

Emily gazed at him in consternation. Her first fancy dress ball! Why should he demean himself by appearing as a paltry mountebank, and how could he force her to appear in the most humiliating of all possible rôles? A hot tide of anger and rebellion surged up in her heart, and she, even Emily, raised her foot to stamp in ungovernable rage.

Yet even in the very act she hesitated, and, struck by a new thought, she remained in that stork-like posture, while she considered the matter more seriously.

"After all," she said to herself, "Mr. Fatigay is a man, and no doubt he knows best. To me this evening's gaiety seems highly charged with glamour and romance, but it is clear that to him, since he elects to behave farcically, it must be a matter of very little importance. His serious attention is, of course, reserved for higher things than this, and though his good breeding forbids him to remain insolently aloof from the company, he saves his dignity by joining them only in a jesting way."

"Or, perhaps," she continued, bringing her right foot gently to the ground, "it is possible that he considers the Comic muse to be as worthy of reverence as any other, and all the worthier, perhaps, in this degenerate age, when romance is bedecked in the tinsel of Wardour Street, and

## MODERN PROSE

sentiment is become the pander to every weakly sensual instinct. Then, when all caricature is good, self-caricature is best and most salutary, for our vanities may survive being mocked as ours, but to see another mocking them in himself must leave us in no doubt as to either his sincerity or his knowledge of the subject. Well, if I am to be a jest, I'll see to it that I am a hearty one. I'll dance the can-can. Ride, Pagliacci!" and she promptly obeyed Mr. Fatigay's eager beckoning as he set off to gain audience with the stewardess.

That night the lights of the *Stella Mundi* shone bright on its first-class nordic chivalry, on brave women and fair men. They all looked very vulgar.

In the silence which followed the second dance, a trivial and wispy tune tinkled outside, and the door flew open, revealing the broad shallow steps of the companionway, and standing on them was Mr. Fatigay, cold-coloured in the outside starlight, which was very blue, and he was wearing the velvet smoking-jacket, and a pair of tight trousers, and a little hat. Before him hung a child's hurdy-gurdy, and as it dropped reluctantly each strained unearthly note, the tune being the "Barcarolle," Emily, from where she crouched at his feet, arose in her scarlet jacket and trousers, and, shrinkingly brazen, kissed her hands to the company, and began to execute the postures of her dance.

"Oh! how beautiful it is," she thought, as she skipped with exaggerated skimpy care from one extravagant attitude to another, "that this jot of quintessential humour, expressed in an almost

meaningless abstraction, should be capable of entering differently every different mental structure that beholds it, and, like a radium needle, can disintegrate each cancerous collection of experiences into pure laughter and virgin chaos."

"One will think of his career," thought she, revolving, with an appearance of painful conscientiousness, upon one leg, "and another perhaps of his love or of his god. Laughter and new beauty must fuse together in the only *aqua regis* which may dissolve these golden illusions." And, bending down, she turned a couple of somersaults very gravely and precisely.

And as she solemnly kicked there between the rottenly phosphorescent seas without and the rottenly shining faces of her audience within, she exulted in her conception of a renascent humour, remote from the funny as Picasso is from Louis Wain.

"Bless my dear Mr. Fatigay," she murmured, painfully attempting the splits, "for thus weaning me from my cheap and inartistic romanticism. Garbed according to my original ideas, I could have at best been reflected, albeit glowingly, in the shoddy consciousness of my beholders, but now I am breaking up that consciousness, and shedding a clear and bitter light on the dark deep shadows below. How they will love me!"

But at that moment a couple of sharp raps were heard, and a volcano of treacle buried all the subtleties under the strains of "Maggie! Yes Ma! Come right upstairs."

"Look here, old man," said a subaltern, approaching the suddenly arrested work of art in the doorway, "are you coming in or staying out?"

## MODERN PROSE

Like broken instruments of music the disconcerted pair stumbled in. Not a hand! The dancers shot forward, marked time, and shot back again as hydrometer insects do on the surface film of water. Each pair of eyes was fastened, as if by some quickly grown fleshy tentacles, to the pair opposite, and not so much as even a casual glance was bestowed on the discomfited performers.

An interval followed, and then another dance, then another and another, and still no response was accorded by the feminine element to any of Mr. Fatigay's shy smiles, nor did Emily hear, as still she half hoped to, any manly bass voice at her elbow, murmuring excuses to her partner, and entreating of her the favour of a dance.

Indignation now began to mount the chimp's bosom, less on her own account than because of the effect, becoming increasingly marked in her master's dejected bearing, that their cold reception and this almost pointed neglect was having upon him. It seemed as if he was beginning to feel himself a failure.

All at once an idea came into her head. Unostentatiously she slipped from his side, and quietly left the great saloon. In a few moments she had gained the upper deck, whence she clambered perilously down a stanchion till she could gain footing in the porthole which lit the stateroom of an American heiress. She leapt noiselessly to the floor, and peeping behind the curtain of a hanging cupboard, she drew forth the object of her search, a magnificent scarlet shawl which she had once noticed that lady to be wearing.

In this she hurriedly draped herself, and, taking



## MR. FATIGAY AND THE CHIMP

from the dressing-table a pair of large jade earrings, she screwed these on, and hastened from the room in search of a rose and a low-crowned black hat.

In the saloon the heat had grown intense, and the dancers halted more and more frequently for refreshments. Stewards glided easily among the flashing throng, bearing claret cup, Cydrax, and iced lemonade. Champagne was to be purchased at a sufficient price. Bright eyes now shone with an extra brightness; the hot blood bloomed in every cheek. Masculine murmurs, tapping at the heart as a neurologist taps on the patella reflex, or Moses on the rock, elicited silvery laughter in sudden fountains all about the saloon. The bandsmen paused a moment, leaning back to mop their foreheads, yet even without the music the mounting spirit of the evening went on, up to the moment of full tide.

"Now," said the M.C. to himself. "Now's the time for the balloons."

But before he could leave the room to call for these, the doors sprang apart, and there stood Carmen, glowing dark and deadly as a poppy, drawing all eyes by her fatal southern attraction; her lips, behind the crimson flower, curving in a smile wherein passion and scorn slumbered lightly side by side.

"Carmen!" The words burst forth simultaneously from every male throat in the saloon. The conductor, an artist to the finger-tips, instantly gave the word to the band, and, as Emily advanced towards the spellbound assembly, the opening chords of "Toreador" blazed out into the vibrant air.

## MODERN PROSE

"Carmen!" Subalterns, civil servants, diamond smugglers, judges, motor salesmen, confidence men, all that well-tubbed clean-limbed throng advance to do her homage.

"Carmen!" And as the band rises once more in the modern and almost equally appropriate notes of "Valencia," the crowd, in one eager husky murmur, entreats her to dance.

But now, with a superb and tigerish gesture of contempt, she passes through their dividing midst to where a single solitary figure droops disconsolate against the wall. Plucking the hot-hued blossom from her lips, she laughingly flings it at his feet, and extending a graceful hand, she has drawn the suddenly awakened Mr. Fatigay into the whirling maze of the dance.

*His Monkey Wife, or Married to a Chimp.* 1930.

## XII

WYNDHAM LEWIS

### The Toilette of a Gossip-Star

[A section from a long and scarifying satire on the affectation, vanity, and inanity of modern life exhibited in the excruciating capers of a series of grotesque puppets. Here a once celebrated society beauty in decrepit age continues to fuss over her toilette as fiercely as in her heyday. Everything, even the punctuation, is stylized in this extravagant but etchedly sharp caricature.]

A GREY-HAIRED lady's-maid stood with a monk-like reverence before the figure of her mistress. The veteran beauty awoke and the maid cast down her eyes. She then approached, armed for the carding of her lady's hair.

Trapezoid in profile—an indoor model of the Maya Pyramid, the building for which that structure is the blank pedestal represented by her savage head—Lady Fredigonde Follett received the combing at first with immobility.

"We will dispense with the second transformation, Bridget!"

The voice of her ladyship abruptly boomed upon the air of her colossal bed-vault and boudoir in one.

"Yes milady!"

The response came from the tutelary penguin, clockwork answering clockwork, while it figged out the other as if it had been its big doll.

## MODERN PROSE

"I have not worn that cap for some time!" thundered the magister, the aristocrat, strapped up erect in her upholstered box, puncheon within puncheon, tossing with temper. The comb relaxed in its strokes until the reports had ceased bursting from the crater of her lips.

"Which cap was it your ladyship wished for?"

The comb slowed down not to rock the breath that was to expel the mistress's answer through the slack parchment tinted with lipstick.

"The one of course I got the pattern of from old Mrs. Hennessey, before her death perhaps you recollect—the one old Pamela Hennessey passed on to me you understand!"

The lips of parchment whinnied "Hennessey," and shaken at the same time by the vicious plucks of the comb, the large false teeth rattled in the horse-like skull, while she panted at this person for so long a body-servant with a patrician scorn bridled and bitted, with hissing politeness:

"Can you find it do you think—I should be so glad if you could, to-day for a change I fancy I might use that one, what do you think—can you put your hand on it, are you sure?"

Putting her hand in fancy upon the caps, Bridget responded—

"I think I can milady. Is it the cap that your ladyship——?"

"It is the cap, it is the reticella," shortwinded there was a lacuna, "a pattern I got," an asthmatic air-pocket, a particle slipped, "old Mrs. Hennessey."

Huzza huzza huzza! there followed a thin peppery coughing.

## TOILETTE OF A GOSSIP-STAR

" Yes milady."

" Mrs. Hennessey."

" Your ladyship ? "

" Hennessey ! "

She scoffed out the winged word in a long brazen whinny.

" Will your ladyship have the clan ribbons ? "

The ribbons that went with the caps of startling buff scarlet and agate, of her clan tartan. Also perhaps the lozenge to which as Fredigonde she was entitled (both according to the Lyon Office and the Ulster Office) chiselled upon the face of a locket, reposing upon the ribbon and fixing it to the cap, or else a Houssa brooch from Gando, a talismanic gift of Mr. Zagreus. There was a pause, it was followed by a muted bellow that buffeted Bridget busy behind her.

" How can I put tartan Bridget upon reticella ? " then in a harsh hushed aside—addressed to herself as if to a third party—" Upon reticella ! "

Bridget was dumb.

" Is it feasible to place tartan upon reticella, it is impossible tartan upon reticella ! "

This went unanswered too—ear-trumpet in hand, to catch any whisper of contradiction that might escape the naked ear, Lady Fredigonde frothed up the silence with the spermy energy of her tongue.

" Dash it Bridget can you be so blind ! " in sudden testy open temper. " Dash it Bridget have you eyes in your head ? I think not."

The echo died away. There was a guilty hush but without so much as the ghost of a sporting peccavi. *Tartan upon reticella !* The four walls swam—around the culprit in giddy charivari—

## MODERN PROSE

splashed with the tartans of Scotch-Whisky posters. The silence hummed horridly with the nasal complaint of the pipes. Lady Fredigonde delivered a large detached sniff: as if the signal for the tart reply of the so-far tongue-tied dummy, it was answered in prompt undertone.

"Milady has worn" Bridget was heard to object, but not loudly "the clan-ribbon upon all her caps——"

But her voice stopped at caps. Fredigonde heavily fluffed the dialogue before her "caps" was out.

"Since *Christmas!*" in a withering assent "since Christmas I have done that," and her ladyship nodded to the air, curtsied clumsily with her skull to Its Emptiness.

"Since December your ladyship."

Picking at a scurfy root Bridget muttered her qualification.

The pedestrian cap, of unimportant toilettes, had, day by day, lain beneath the tartan.

"Since Christmas I have done so yes" yawned her ladyship, remitting suddenly these black provocations, "since Christmas. It was a barbarous expedient—temporary measure."

A spasm of asthma transfixed her, faintly colouring her temples.

"It was my idea by that means to admonish a barbarity."

"Yes milady."

But this was too much, if Bridget was to persist, the old mule, what next!

"Please, Bridget, keep your nostrils away from my nuque, you tickle me as I've remarked before. I believe there's a beetle in my hair, will you be

## TOILETTE OF A GOSSIP-STAR

so good as to remove it? No there, over my ear. That's it."

As the comb tugged at the pale green yarn, Lady Fredigonde met it with a massive libration—she was glad to rock her head. Aside from that for self-expression there was nothing left her in her body. The neck had survived, that was still elastic, but it dwelt upon a plaster-bust. Her arms were of plaster—they moved, but upon either hand of a lay-torso. Too stately to maltreat—as she had been used with her person, in her hey-day, like a naughty horse—she still would exercise her headpiece sharply, upon the ruined clock-work of her trunk. In dumb-show or stationary make-believe she would sweep and roll with it, as if it were still carried hither and thither, from apartment to apartment, or swept through the air above her hunter, strapped to a black billy-cock, as it galloped after foxes, or else, tossed in the sports of Venus in preposterous fourposters of the epoch of the middle class Elizabeth, Victoria. Ex-Gossip-column-belle, she behaved like an independent elf that had crept into this roughly carved knap. She directed the eyes this way and that, propelled the tongue and lips with appropriate phrases, peering now and then down the dark shafts, godspeeding the offerings of milk, fruit and eggs. In this manner she had composed her differences with matter.

"I think my hair is a very surprising substance : nothing seems able to pull it out."

"Your ladyship has beautiful hair, still. It is very strong."

"It must be conceded that it is very strong."

## MODERN PROSE

She made her head buck viciously against the comb.

Heralded with a low nasal growl that took the aspect of a "though" asthmatically Fredigonde burst into a petulant rumination, the oldest spoilt-baby in Britain by seven summers—oldest veteran Gossip-Star.

"Though rather a disgusting colour, don't you think—why is it not a proper white? I am sufficiently old, it cannot be on the score of age that my scalp has not quit dyeing the follicles old gold or is it what I eat? It can't be the sandwiches. I must knock off chocolate."

The distinct silence, say a quarter-minute, to establish a respectful distance twixt answer and question, was clocked out by the servant.

"If milady would allow me to order——"

"I have said once" crashed out the raging voice of the mistress, "that you shall not order for me the trash you have often mentioned from the chemist. Am I compelled to repeat it!"

The clock struck off a good number of hefty seconds, standing, in the centre of the mantelpiece, upon its bandy bronze legs and claws.

"It is a recognized bleaching agent milady" with thrilling quietness the maid insisted in the most appropriate language to persuade—"of great efficacy."

As an afterthought she whispered—"By all the medical profession."

The irresistible formula fell flat. A nasal purr spread to her chest and with a puff Fredigonde retorted:

"Of great efficacy, what is efficacy! I have never heard of it! You use the thing yourself if



## TOILETTE OF A GOSSIP-STAR

you must my girl. Efficacy ! as though I wanted to be decorated with spots like Lady Hortense Spankmann-Trotter that was, who sought to be white before her time—as I should be if I listened to your tips for bleaching dirty dowagers ! ”

The maid's hand still swept with her hand-harrow with the action of shuttles up and down the green rood. It was grained with all the sea's coastal colours. The head-growth was as heavy as seaweed, in the maid's palm.

“ No milady.”

Then the hair must still be the strange green of age, not the beautiful white of eternity—in spite of the tips *sub rosa* of the beauty-doctor and cosmetic statistics, cut out of the *Fortnightly Gentle-lady*.

Fredigonde squatted plumb, approximately at the centre of a great room, her formidable image framed by a cheval-glass. The room accommodated a state-bed where it grew dark almost a decametre from the windows. A sleeveless garment hung to the floor contained by a silver morse, from which each stiffened neaf projected, occasionally touched by spasms as her temper rose. Her buccinator muscle let down a pasty shield upon either side of her face. Like two dour blinkers that had slipped, these cheeks flapped sometimes as she spoke, and her eyes flashed in the white helm of her head.

The carding was succeeded by the ritual of the construction of the bun. The bold wattle-work was effected in swift-fingered in-and-out of human basket-making. The bun was completed. Twenty minutes had elapsed. Bridget now moved to the right-hand side of the vast chair, tongs in

hand, in order to address herself to the manufacture of the curls.

As the curls were being laid down, beside each other, in stiffened cylinders, the eyes of her ladyship glazed. She began to pooh with a soft whistling pout. This was a nap upon which the solitary mason of this quick monument, so sharp-tongued a monolith, counted. Bridget put the finishing touches to the beldam, her mighty mistress, point by point, stepping about the passive purring skull that was her cult and old single-woman's bachelor passion.

Her ladyship awoke as the last touches ceased. She raised her head with slumberous majesty and she perceived that the curls were there. She was now at eye-practice for a spell after the glooms of sleep. At present she moved her gums, upon which the teeth hung, in and out, preparatory to a dialogue.

"I think we will have the cap, now we will have the cap."

The first uncertain whinny after the doze was thick.

"Milady."

"The cap. The cap."

"Yes your ladyship the cap is here. Will your ladyship have it?"

"Have it? Certainly. The cap."

It was the cap, modelled upon that of Mrs. Hennessey, of the finest reticella.

Lady Fredigonde lifted from her knees a hand-mirror, her hand grasping it as a diver's flexible masked paw might mechanically seize some submarine object. She held it steadily before her and examined the curled but capless bust.

## TOILETTE OF A GOSSIP-STAR

What a decadent emperor ! Bridget crowned her with the cap. Gingerly held on high, she lowered it, breathing through her ears, down upon the crown of the head. The seagreen of the hair, the formal surf of the cap, coalesced.

" A little more over the left eye : no a thought forward and up, forward and then up, over my left eye—my left one. You're not tall enough really are you to attend to me, you are too short by half a foot."

The reticulated eaves were poked up from the green margin of hair by two forked fingers with their lustreless plates of copper skin.

" Dear me, my head one would say has grown : how very odd that would be if it were the case."

She rocked her headpiece as if it had been a pumpkin and the surface of the vegetable's mother-earth had extended just beneath her chin.

" It is not so big as I thought. An alternative to my head having grown is I suppose that the cap may have shrunk in the wash."

" Your ladyship will pardon me, I think it is the same as it was before."

" Which. The cap or the head ? "

" The cap your ladyship."

" I think you are mistaken, I should certainly say that it is a quarter of an inch out quite that—I am very familiar with this landscape garden."

Indomitable, detached geologist, she cast a professional eye over her polar ice-cap.

But cap and hair had not conformed to her canon—the pattern of the cap-cum-curled-temples of fancy. She replaced the mirror upon her lap and she looked sideways at her maid. Bridget

## MODERN PROSE

refused her face of an old sheepish scapegoat (which she had averted) to the lazy circling of the predatory eye. Fredigonde heaved a surly breath and as before took up the hand-glass.

The elements of the arrangement proposed were as follows. Three distinct zones were involved. There was that of the white arcs in perspective of the cap, there was the green region of hair, and there was the pallid copper of the skin. She snapped them together, half shutting a connoisseurish eye and expected the synthesis.

Depositing the hand-glass and the hand fixed round its handle upon her knees then, she said—

“ I give it up, did you hear me Bridget—let us after all have yesterday’s cap.”

The servant wearily rustled in her shadow, her dark arms rising to remove the reticella.

“ Will your ladyship have the clan ribbons? ”

The old lady’s hands trembled and she thundered,

“ Yes ! ”

Her *Yes* had that full-chested hiss of dark volumes of escaping steam, spat from a geyser, noted by travellers. It was such an absolute *Yes* in its empty force, that her hands quaked upon her lap.

So back to the tartan !

*The Apes of God.* 1931.

## XIII

### PHILIP LINDSAY

#### Agincourt

#### *The March*

ON Sunday, October 6, 1415, King Henry V. set out on the splendid adventure. The distance from Harfleur to Calais was believed to be a hundred miles—it was more nearly double. The army was formed up in the customary mediæval three battles: vanward, mainward, and rere-ward, with two separate columns covering the flanks to left and right. The van was commanded by John Cornwall and Gilbert Umfraville; the King commanded the centre, supported by his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, with John Holland and the Lord de Roos; the rear was under the Duke of York and the Earl of Oxford. It was not the splendid army that had sailed from Southampton Water. Disease and sudden death had thinned the ranks, and even those remaining veterans must have been lean and scarred, their armour dirtied, jacks torn and decayed, helmets dented.

Out of Harfleur they marched doggedly, behind their young King.

Henry took his baggage with him. There were jewels packed on his sumpter-mule; his crown,

## MODERN PROSE

his sword of State, the chancery seals, and a piece of the True Cross six inches long and over an inch wide, all followed him under the care of a sergeant of the pantry. Besides the army, he had with him the usual non-combatants, the chaplains and clerks and court officials. Amongst these chaplains we are indeed fortunate that Thomas Elmham dared the great adventure. Because of this we have two first-hand accounts written by him—one in verse, one in prose.

Henry had issued strict orders against pillaging, but the French knew of his advance and had laid waste the country, and it was hard for his men to resist stealing what food they could. All the same, it does appear that the march was—at least at first—particularly orderly. . . .

Great as the French army was, courageous as the men were individually, it was but a disorganized mass, the leaders quarrelling with each other about precedence and refusing to obey the commands of men whom they considered their inferiors or their equals. The Dauphin, who should have been captain, was entirely useless; his efforts to drag money from the people almost led to a revolt, and many began to prefer the orderly English to their own tax-gatherers. . . .

At every spot he (Henry) touched on the river (the Somme) he found broken bridges and causeways, and the river itself swirling down impassably. Along the riverside tramped the English with growing despair. It seemed that they would have to follow the accursed Somme to its source before they could pass. Broken bridge

after broken bridge, smashed causeways, wide areas of swamp and a rushing river. Food was running short, and they had only prayers to help support them on that desperate march; their stomachs rebelled against a diet of dried meat, walnuts, and water.

Their hopes revived a little at Boves, for the castle was under the command of one of Burgundy's men who was away at the time. Here they were admitted and given quarters for the night, but little else. All the food obtainable consisted of but two baskets of bread, which couldn't have amounted to much more than a crumb or two per man. But there was wine. And the men fought for that wine as if they were battling with deadly enemies, struggling around the vats and barrels in a frenzy.

Henry tried to stop the uproar.

"What need?" asked some one. "The brave fellows are only filling their bottles."

"Their bottles!" cried Henry. "They are making great bottles of their bellies and getting drunk!"

Passing through a village, one of the soldiers entered a church and stole a pyx that contained the Host. It was a copper-gilt pyx and looked very like gold. When Henry heard of the sacrilege he halted his troops and refused to budge a step until the thief was brought to him. The poor wretch was hanged on a tree, and the gold-looking pyx was given back to the church.

Red rags hung from the walls of Nesle to show that the garrison was defiant, but when Henry started to burn the countryside the rags were pulled down. The garrison, only too eager for

him to pass, explained that there were two unguarded fords nearby. These fords were at Béthencourt and Voyennes and were both approached by a causeway over the swamp. The men of Nesle had not lied. The soldiers sent to guard these fords had decided that the English must be miles away, and the path was open. It was a tricky path, however, only approached over marsh-lands into which the men sank to their armpits. Then when the marsh was crossed, the causeways were found to be broken. Henry set his men to work rebuilding them, pulling down nearby houses, chopping trees, and gradually the causeways were made firm again. It took all day to finish the task, from eight in the morning until nightfall, and even then there were parts not wide enough for two men to walk abreast. One causeway was given to the troops, the other to the baggage-mules and horses.

After crossing the Somme, Henry awoke the next morning to receive a challenge from the French army suggesting a meeting-place at which to battle. The King listened calmly to the stupid suggestion and said: "Let all things be done that are pleasing to God." When he was asked what road he intended using, he replied: "Straight to Calais. And if our adversaries attempt to stop this road, they will do so to their own hurt and great peril. We indeed do not seek them, nor will fear make us move either more quickly or more slowly. Nevertheless, we do urge them not to hinder our way, nor to seek so great an effusion of Christian blood." Then giving the heralds two hundred crowns, he dismissed them,



probably delighted to find some tangible force ahead after the varying rumours he had heard.

Yet as he advanced no army barred his path, but near Péronne he saw in the mud the swirl and the twist of the feet of men and the hoofs of horses, he saw the marks of thousands, of the passing of a gigantic army, and he knew then that the heralds had spoken no empty threat.

Actually both armies were marching very close to each other ; and if the French had had a great leader, Henry could have been destroyed again and again by a surprise attack. But the French had decided in council to wait until they could find a suitable battle-ground : in other words, one in which they would have every advantage. This was sound enough, but it scarcely seemed necessary when the enemy were so terrifically outnumbered and exhausted as the English. By holding the bridges, the French could have stopped Henry from crossing the Somme at Canche, and now again at Blangy. Henry crossed here with barely any trouble. Blangy was the last crossing of the march.

When the English were on the opposite bank and had clambered up a tall hill, they saw before them, coming from the valley to their right, great swarms of French pouring along in uncountable masses. Through the narrow neck they came, armour glinting, spear-heads shining like diamonds, Frenchman after Frenchman—cavalry, infantry, archers—and Henry must surely have felt some qualms as he gazed upon the dirty ragged group of hungry men at his back.

From the hilltop, Henry stared down at the French riding through the valley—infantry and

baggage-carts, guns being dragged forward—until all the land was covered between Agincourt and Ruisseauville, and the enemy looked “like an innumerable host of locusts,” says Elmham, “with only a small valley between them and us.”

### *The Battle*

We must glance over the ground. There were three villages, each within a wood, and the battle-field lay between these villages. Agincourt—to-day called Azincourt—was to the north-west, Tramecourt to the north-east, Maisoncelles to the south. Between Agincourt wood and Tramecourt wood the field narrowed to about three-quarters of a mile in breadth, but widened out towards Maisoncelles. The ground was therefore roughly triangular.

As they poured out of the valley, the French were making for the north, to lie in the narrow space between Agincourt and Tramecourt, and this choice of battle-ground was—to say the least—rather peculiar. It gave no particular advantage to either side, and there was no possibility of playing tricks of any kind, ambushes, surprise-tactics, and such. It would have to be a clean fight.

We cannot be sure of the numbers of the opposing forces. Henry had no more, and probably a few less, men than when he had set out from Harfleur (viz. nine hundred men-at-arms and five thousand archers). The French are variously stated. Elmham, who was present, says that the English amounted to six thousand, which is very likely correct, but he seems to make the French

too large. They probably looked gigantic to him as he watched with horror the tiny English force and the monster gathering ahead. He said that there were ten times as many French as English. One cannot tell what to believe when examining mediæval numerals. Perhaps I am maligning poor Elmham; the French may have been ten times greater, certainly their force was very superior to the English. The lowest contemporary statement places them as three times larger, although they must have been more than that. If we say from four to five times greater we shall probably get somewhere near the actual numbers.

The disparity was certainly so enormous that even Henry faltered. He sent across the prisoners he had captured on the march, on condition that they would return to him if he won the day, and he offered to treat for peace. He said that he would give up all that he had won and would pay for all damage if they would but let him pass. He added that if his request was refused he asked only that they would fight him the next day.

For the first and only time we see a weakness in Henry, for once his confidence forsook him and his destiny dwindled before that locust-army in his path. Yet he was not afraid. When his offer was curtly refused, he drew up his men in battle-array, wheeling his forces so that the van became his left and the rearguard his right. All knights were ordered to dismount, the King himself doing the same, and those who could confessed to the chaplains.

"Sire," said Sir Walter Hungerford, "I would that we had ten thousand more good English

## MODERN PROSE

archers who would gladly be here with us to-day."

"Thou speakest as a fool!" cried Henry. "By the God of Heaven, on Whose grace I lean, I would not have one more even if I could. This people is God's people. He has entrusted them to me to-day, and He can bring down the pride of these Frenchmen who boast of their numbers and their strength!"

Then turning amongst the young autumn wheat, he spoke to his men, bidding them remember Crécy and Poitiers. And after he had spoken, all knelt and raised clasped hands to God, while the chaplains went through the ranks, confessing the men and giving them the Eucharist.

But it seemed that there would be no fighting this day. As evening came upon the two armies in that little space, Henry saw the French breaking ranks and seeking lodgings. This was a welcome reprieve, for his men were tired. He issued strict orders that complete silence must be kept; no knight was to speak under penalty of losing his right ear. In the rain the men stretched themselves quietly amongst the fresh, warm-smelling wheat, or in the nearby gardens and orchards.

This strange silence worried the French who were drinking, eating and shouting and laying odds on the amount of prisoners and booty they would capture on the morrow; they feared that the English were sneaking off, and lit great fires and sent out detachments to scout in the surrounding country.

At one point between Maisoncelles and Trame-

## AGINCOURT

court the opposing armies were so close that they could see each other's faces through the gloom, and the silent English lay in the mud and the wet grass, listening to the riot, the drinking, the boasting, the quarrelling, a few yards off. That could have been no pleasant experience. They were hopelessly outnumbered, it would seem, and in that silence they could hear quite distinctly the rowdy French laying odds on who should capture King Henry. And not far distant, the French nobles were jesting as they painted a cart in which they were going to drag the King of England through the streets of Paris and Rouen.

Thus passed the night of Thursday, October 24, 1415.

Henry was on his feet at daybreak, dressed in full armour save for his helm, and wearing the royal jupon—three gold lilies of France on a blue ground, three gold leopards of England on a red ground.

After Mass, he formed his men into one line, for his host was too small for reserves; this line was four deep, and spread out before the wood of Maisoncelles. Henry himself commanded the centre, the Duke of York held the right, and Lord Camoys the left. On either side of each division his archers were thrown forward, in formation like a split triangle; therefore, when divisions were side to side these archers met, forming a complete triangle, a series of wedges, known as a "herse" or harrow. On left and right flanks the wedges were incomplete, but were safeguarded by the woods. The tip of each wedge pointed towards the enemy, and was four

or five feet deep, so that the archers could fire in every direction. The Duke of York had suggested the cutting of long stakes, and these were driven into the mushy ground before each archer, point outwards, as a protection against cavalry; these stakes stretched out knee-high. The horses and grooms were taken to the rear, horses ready saddled; chaplains, baggage, and the sick were sent to the wood, where the religious were commanded to celebrate Mass and to pray for grace all through the battle.

His forces disposed, Henry donned his bascinet which bore a gold crown encrusted with jewels—with pearls, sapphires, and a great spinel ruby. Unspurred, he mounted a grey palfrey and watched his men fall into line, under the strict command of dead silence. The banners were unfurled and the royal standard shook above the King, bearing the arms of Our Lady, the Trinity, St. Edward and St. George.

Henry asked what hour it was, and was told that it was prime—that is, six o'clock in the morning, the first Church office of the opening day. "Now is good time," he cried, "for all England prayeth for us; let us therefore be of good cheer and go to our journey."

But the French were in no mood for attack. They had spent the night drinking and gambling and were rather weary. There seemed to them no reason for haste, as their force was vastly superior to the English. They were quarrelling most of the time on the question of precedence, each knight desiring the honour of being in the front rank, and the archers were contemptuously

pushed to the rear, for they were not gentlemen. There was no leader, there was a collection of leaders, which is fatal to any army. All these leaders banded themselves together to form the front rank, and the van became the flower of the army, consisting of knights and men-at-arms carrying spears. Everything was so crowded, so muddled, that it is difficult for us to understand the exact formation. These knights and men-at-arms in the van were on foot, their spears and pikes being cut down for close-fighting, and there was a detachment of horsemen on either flank which was to swerve in and turn the English archers. Towards the rear were the cavalry and cross-bowmen.

For three hours the two armies faced each other, the English tense for the expected attack, the French apparently doing nothing. So great was the crush in the French van that many of the standards had to be furled and sent away, and there were constant arguments because the Burgundians objected to serving under the Armagnacs and the Armagnacs objected to serving under the Burgundians.

The terrible strain of waiting was beginning to tell on the silent English, who were weary and half-starved, and it must have been demoralizing for so small a group to watch the gathering of that gigantic host.

Crossing himself, Henry gave the command to advance.

"Forward, banner!" he cried, "in the name of Jesus, Mary and St. George!"

Each man kneeled three times, kissing the ground to show that he would rather die than run

## MODERN PROSE

away, and pressing earth to his lips, in the mediæval manner, for a last earth-housel.

Sir Thomas Erpingham flung his warder into the air, and the cry was passed to the archers :

“Knee ! Stretch !”

Then amidst the trumpets and drums, the English gave three shouts of defiance, “Hurrah ! Hurrah ! St. George and Merry England !” and moved forward towards that mighty enemy, on the cool morning of St. Crispin’s Day.

At the English advance, the horsemen posted on the French flanks wheeled in to break the archers. But the ground was sodden with rain and the horses slipped, pawed futilely for a grip ; those that drew close enough, fell upon the stakes, while the “arrowy hail” terrified the beasts, killed them or sent them flying back in hopeless disorder. They penetrated their own ranks, and the van—contrary to d’Albret’s command—rushed forward with the cry of “Montjoie ! Montjoie !”

In one gigantic mass of knights and men-at-arms the van swept down upon that little English host ; clad in metal from toe to head, gripping their shortened lances, sliding along the wet ground, the chivalry of France swept down like a living sea of steel upon the English. And the English stood their ground. String drawn to ear, the shaft let fly ; string to ear again, another shaft. . . .

The French were pulled up by that unerring fire and their ranks were broken by the fleeing



mounted wings; their courage seemed to fall from them as if from men standing suddenly before an abyss from which they cannot draw back. Then the English archers rushed amongst them with mace and axe, smashing at them as at so much inanimate tin, hitting them on the bodies, in the faces; the knights in their heavy armour and in the too-great crush were unable to hit back at the swift, lightly dressed English.

For a moment, weight of numbers told and the English line fell back a spear's length, then it stood firm, and the archers, using their bows, wiped out hundreds upon hundreds of the confused French, calmly shooting at them as if at a butt. When arrows were exhausted, these yeomen—not knights but yeomen—slung their bows on their backs and charged into that sea of steel, slaughtering enemy after enemy.

The whole battle seems incredible to us now, inexplicable. These few English murdered the French. It was little else, there was almost no real fighting. We cannot explain it except on the definite charge of cowardice, for the French ran. They were driven panic-stricken like men pursued by hornets. Much of the slaughter must also be put down to the actual numbers of the French. They had so many men that they were unable to fight, they were just "rolled up"—in the army phrase—they fell down and were trampled on. Those in the van tried to push back, those in the rear tried to push forward. All the while the English were slashing at them, beating them like metal on an anvil, stabbing into their faces with whatever came to hand—

with swords, axes, maces, daggers, arrow-heads, spears.

There was no opportunity for individual exploits, although Henry, we are told, did prodigies of heroism, and he actually rescued the Duke of Gloucester, his brother, by standing astride his fallen body until help came. He had a bodyguard of archers who shot or clubbed a path for him ; then he would dart forward with his men and work great havoc. And there was a group of French knights, eighteen in all, who pledged themselves to capture Henry's crown or die, " which they did." One of them knocked a fleuron off, but that was all the damage done.

It was said that many of the French surrendered ten times over, but there was no chance of taking prisoners at the moment. The fighting was too hot, and the men were carried exultantly off their feet by the amazing victory. The dead mounted higher and higher, and the English used them, jumping on to the bodies, and stabbing, clubbing. . . . In their stifling armour the French were helpless. Once down they could not rise again, while the lightly armed English archers—some with wicker bascinets faced with iron, some with leather hoods, most with leather or cloth jackets, all barefoot—could be anywhere, leaping in and out of the *mêlée*, delivering swift deadly strokes.

And all the time, the French rear stood idle, watching the slaughter, because it had received no orders.

Within half an hour, the English had pushed their way clean through the French ranks, and

then they stopped to breathe and to watch the flying enemy. It was the moment for plunder, for the taking of prisoners, and they wandered amongst the bodies on the ground, seeking by jupon or helm men of noble birth, killing those badly wounded, hitting them in the face and body.

As they wandered amongst the corpses and the wounded, somebody shouted that French reinforcements were coming, that the fugitives had conquered their fears and were returning. They heard the distant war-cry of "Brabant! Brabant!" and at the same time news came that peasants were plundering the King's baggage in the rear and had actually carried off, amongst other things, the royal crown, the sword of State and the chancery seals.

Fearing to be taken on both sides—for the prisoners must have exceeded his own army—Henry gave the command that all must be killed. His men nearly rebelled at this. What! kill so much ransom! But Henry was determined. The risk was too great to run for the sake of money, but at the same time he forbade the killing of any who had fallen to his share. He swore that he would hang those who did not obey; he called a group of archers to him ready to execute the threat, and sullenly the English murdered their prisoners in cold blood.

The poor wretches of Frenchmen were at the moment unhelmed, as their captors were stripping them of valuable armour, and now their throats were cut, their faces slashed, their heads hit, and their bellies stabbed. Those who had been carried into houses to have their wounds

## MODERN PROSE

tended were not spared ; the houses were burnt down on top of them. Even when all danger was past, the prisoners were still murdered.

For the cry that had started the whole massacre, the cry of "Brabant !" had been the act of a few reckless men.

The younger son of the Duke of Burgundy, Anthony Duke of Brabant, had ridden hard with a small troop to join the battle. He galloped so fast that he got far ahead of his men, and with only a few knights behind him reached the tragic scene—too late. As his full armour was not with him, he tore the blazon from a trumpet, made a hole in it and pushed his head through the hole, using it as a jupon—a sleeveless surcoat. Then he charged on his courageous and lunatic venture.

His throat was cut by some soldier who thought him not worthy of ransom, not knowing who he was because of the trumpet-blazon he wore instead of the knightly jupon.

### *Outcome*

Henry has been damned heavily because of this ghastly slaughter, but only later historians have damned him. The French at the time vented their rage wholly on the dead Brabant who had been the cause of it. He should have known that his countrymen were beaten, they said ; if he had not led that silly charge, the flower of France would still have lived. And this is what galled the French—not that their chivalry had died, but that it had died at the hands of despised yeomen.

## AGINCOURT

The amount of dead it is impossible to calculate. The English said that from 10,000 to 15,000 French were killed, and from 16 to 40 English. These numbers may be correct. Other writers, including the French, place the English losses from 100 to 600. Monstrelet is the one exception, he gives the English dead at 16,000, an obviously false figure.

When the battle was over, Henry asked what castle it was he saw in the distance through the rain which had begun towards the end of the flight, and he was told that it was Agincourt.

"Then," said he, "let this day be called the Battle of Agincourt."

He tried to stop too much plundering for there might still be dangers ahead. He commanded that no man take more than he could easily carry. This did not save many of the wounded; spared by the English, they were plundered and murdered by their own peasants as they crawled off into the woods.

The bodies of the English dead—those which could be recognized—were taken apart and placed in a large barn, together with whatever plunder could not be carried off, and the whole was set alight and burnt to the ground. Only the corpses of the Duke of York, the Earl of Suffolk and a few others were saved from the fire. They were parboiled until the flesh dropped off, and the bones were collected for transport to England.

That night Henry, we are told, was served at dinner by his more important prisoners—who

## MODERN PROSE

included the Duke of Orléans—and talked friendlily with them, not forgetting to point out that the victory had been given by God to His favoured nation.

Then he lay down and slept at Maisoncelles, close to the glorious and bloody field of Agincourt.

*King Henry V. A Chronicle.* 1934.

## XIV

### ARTHUR BRYANT

#### Women's Life : Yesterday and To-day

[In a series of talks broadcast in 1933 under the title *The National Character*, later published in book form, Mr. Bryant gave his estimate of the qualities of Englishmen through the ages. He dealt with seven types, country gentleman, parson, yeoman farmer, craftsman, merchant, adventurer, housewife. This is the second half of the last talk, *The Housewife*.]

FOR an English country house of those days was a little world of its own—a factory, agricultural and domestic, as well as a house. Everything was made in it, and in its outlying barns, yards, and breweries ; even the candles and rush-lights, the soap, the tooth-washes, so dear to our ancestors, of “vinegar, rosemary, myrrh, ammonia, dragon’s herb, rock alum, and fine cinnamon,” and the like. There was the household to be tended and directed, far vaster than any modern one, since everything had to be done at home, and there were no public services for supplying so many of the needs of life as there are to-day ; there were the fishponds to be stocked, the herb garden to be tended, the sick to be nursed and prescribed to from those curious herbals which it was the delight of housewives to compile, such as that “purginge drinke” which the housekeeper at Claydon prepared for the “maids and upholsterer,” but which unhappily made the latter

## MODERN PROSE

so ill. In all this the housewife of those days was not content to be merely sufficient: she gave herself to it with an enthusiasm and exactitude which, though sometimes unscientific and misguided, provided the true zest of life, and without which nobody, man or woman I believe, can be happy.

Most of all did she apply her industry and enthusiasm to the business of feeding her household. No lady in those days was too great to be mistress of her own kitchen. Not only did she deem it her special right and privilege to make cakes and sweetmeats with her own hands for favoured guests, but she made it her business to supervise and direct the whole elaborate science of preparing food. And here, as in everything else, no trouble was too much to provide the very best that thought and ingenuity could devise. Turning over the pages of an old recipe or cooking book, one is amazed by the variety and intricacy of the English housewife's dishes: the kind of study of food and the art of its proper preparation that one finds scarcely anywhere to-day but in an exceptionally good restaurant. Take this recipe for a chicken pie:

To bake a chicken pie, after you have trussed your chickens, then broken their legs and breast bones, and raised your crust of the best paste, you shall lay them in the coffin close together with their bodies full of butter: then lay upon them, and underneath them, Currants, great Raisins, Prunes, Cinnamon, Sugar, whole mace and salt; then cover all with great store of Butter and so bake it; after pour into it the same liquor you did in your Marrow-bone pie, with yolks of two or three Eggs beaten amongst it, and so serve it forth.



## WOMEN'S YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

Thanks to the English housewife no foreign visitor in those days could complain, as poor Walter Page did during his sojourn here in the War, that there were only three vegetables in England and that two of them were cabbage! Though our ancestresses had not the same power as we of taking toll of the most distant corners of the earth to fulfil their needs, they used to the full every resource for the enrichment of man's body and physical well-being that was within their reach. Their salads make rare reading for any one used to the meagre and monotonous salads of the modern English households. "Young buds and knots of all manner of wholesome herbs at their first springing" mixed with red sage, mint, lettuce, violets, marigolds, spinach with a flavouring of almonds, raisins, figs, capers, olives, currants and slices of oranges and lemons, is not bad for a humble housewife. And here I should add that the seventeenth century housewife had a far easier task to obtain pure, fresh, unadulterated natural foods than her modern descendants. The fields, and all their resources, were at her doors. But given that advantage, she deserves full praise: for in her day she made a real art of the business of living, and made, after its own manner, the good fare of England foremost in the world.

Yet the pinnacle of the old English housewife's skill and devotion—as ever with a woman—was the nursery. To "fill the cradle" (emptied so swiftly by infant mortality) "with sweet, brave babes," as one letter of the time puts it, was her supreme aspiration: that and to ensure that those babes should be made partakers of the civiliza-

tion of which she was the minister. So I would leave her, with her children about her, like Lady Verney writing how "my boy is now undressing by me, and is such pretty company that he hinders me so, I cannot write what I would." Or Mrs. Porter with her grandchildren: "I wish you could see me sitting at the table with my little chickens one on either side; in all my life I have not had such an occupation to my content, to see them in bed at night and get them up in the morning."

The same causes as we have seen operating elsewhere to modify the manifestations of English character changed the nature of the English wife. When the rich and powerful became too grand to look after their own nurseries and kitchens, something of the glory was taken from the profession of housewifery. English women are very susceptible to social influences, more so perhaps than their menfolk, and they could scarcely be expected to be very enthusiastic about keeping house when they were told that such a prosaic concern was beneath the dignity of a great lady. They had to do it, most of them, of course, but the thrill of it was gone, and house-keeping in England gradually came to be regarded as a necessary but uninteresting job, to be got over as quickly as possible and in a dull, prideless kind of way. Really fortunate women escaped it altogether: they spent all their time in the drawing-room, played the piano, or (a little later on) bridge, and went in for foreign travel and enlarging their minds. In Victorian days the word "lady" came to mean somebody very elegant and delicate and rarefied, who could not

## WOMEN'S YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

possibly be expected to do any work and who, though socially a great asset, was quite useless. Which was very bad luck for the lady, who suffered from her enforced uselessness a great deal more than anybody else.

† Of course such a state of affairs could not last long : it was too much removed from the realities of human nature, and it required a great deal of surplus wealth to make it possible at all. Only a very rich nation—or at least a nation with a great many very rich people—could preserve, as it were, such exotic and economically useless creatures. ‡ To-day we are no longer a very rich nation in that sense, and few households are wealthy enough to keep a professional house-keeper or can afford to leave the housekeeping to look after itself. Moreover, the ordinary upper class Englishwoman refuses any longer to be relegated to a life of enforced idleness : she demands outlets for her activities and gets them too. So we see her engaging in all sorts of occupations : serving on committees, entering business, running shops, or taking up politics or social service. But unfortunately in all this admirable public activity and enthusiasm, the importance of making the background of life healthy, contentful, and beautiful has been a little overlooked. One does sometimes enter well-to-do English homes in which an air of comely peace pervades the whole family and household (as so clearly from old letters one sees it pervaded English homes two centuries ago), but more often there is some jarring note and a feeling—particularly common in London, I think—that the house is an empty shell from which its inmates would be

rather glad to escape to some gayer kind of existence. And this is a great pity, because we are still deep down a home-loving nation; for all our urbanization, we have not yet learnt to live the kind of social and communal life that comes so easily to most Continental peoples. Perhaps the education of our better-to-do women is to blame; neither skill at lacrosse nor proficiency in passing examinations is very much use in making of woman a graceful, understanding being, nor of interesting her in the real business of life of all who marry. I see signs that many headmistresses are beginning to recognize this and, so far as lies within their power, to direct our educational system into new and wiser channels.

To the less favoured daughters of England, the last century has brought, it seems to me, a terrible depreciation in the art of living. And here I would like to make an important distinction: that in the past hundred years, while the standard of living in England has in many respects risen, the art of living has declined. By the art of living I mean the art of making, with the materials at one's disposal, the most gracious and satisfactory kind of life possible—an art, of course, which is peculiarly the province of the housewife. Here, once more, I fear we have to blame the Industrial Revolution—not the industrialization of England itself (which it is quite rational to argue was a necessary and even desirable thing), but the haphazard, unplanned, and unconsciously inhuman way in which that industrialization was brought about. For everywhere it struck down the ancient arts of life that had flourished so

## WOMEN'S YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

gloriously in this land, and constructed practically nothing in their place.

For the Industrial Revolution banished the English working housewife—the yeoman's wife riding in to market with her panniers full of butter and eggs and chickens—to the little house in the straight drab street of the factory town. And if any one in our England was disinherited it was she. Disinherited from the fields which had been her children's birthright, from all spaciousness for rest and reflection—a periodical need of all human beings, but of a mother most of all—and banished to a world of monotonous brick in which there was neither beauty nor change, nor space to breathe freely. I am not speaking of "slums" in the ordinary sense of the word, but of those hundreds of thousands of respectable working-class streets in which the majority of English people were housed in the nineteenth century, and are still housed to-day. Erected in haste to house the cannon fodder of industry, planned without a thought of convenience, beauty, or physical amenity, these streets have been a prison-house for the English soul. There are far worse slums than in England in other countries. But in no other country, I believe, is so large a proportion of the population housed in a manner so antipathetic to every decent human instinct.

Consider what such homes imply to the ordinary English housewife. Planned by builders who never apparently thought such matters worthy of the least consideration, they pile in the first place every kind of unnecessary burden on the housewife's back. There is usually no hot water,

## MODERN PROSE

and every drop has to be boiled in a kettle or the copper, which as often as not leaks (since those who let working-class houses are usually too poor to keep them in proper repair). In many cases the water has to be carried up from an outdoor pump before it is boiled, and a bath generally entails an uncomfortable and messy operation in an inadequate utensil on the scullery floor. When one remembers the perpetual sooty dew that falls on the just and unjust alike from the sky of any industrial city, the burden that this lack of hot water implies can be realized: one cannot even keep one's hands clean for five minutes, and the little white curtains—that to me pathetic and intensely moving emblem of decency and comeliness which almost every housewife loves to keep flying—and the white doorsteps so heroically scrubbed, become soiled almost as soon as they are cleaned. The kitchen range, instead of being made of some material like glazed porcelain which can be wiped down with a damp cloth, has to be laboriously and elaborately blacked—a back-aching process, entailing loss of both temper and cleanliness; and its cooking possibilities are limited by its out-of-date construction and the extravagant amount of coal it consumes. (And here reflect on the dirt and wastage involved in ten million housewives, all in the closest proximity and divided only by narrow walls from one another, lighting a coal fire every morning in an epoch which has discovered the benefits of central heating and electrical fires.) Then the walls are often damp, covered usually with aged, hideous, and depressing wallpaper which the landlord cannot afford to renew, instead of being dis-

## WOMEN'S YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

tempered or tiled. The rooms are full of unnecessary corners, and every part of the house provides a receptacle for dirt and a problem in human labour and temper to keep clean. Lack of light—never too plentiful under the best of circumstances during our sunless winters—lack of space and lack of privacy complete the dismal picture. The house or flat is too little and, usually—owing to our bad English habit of hoarding, of which our housewife is an ardent devotee—far too full, not only of necessities (which may include the pram and father's bike), but of old, useless junk. As for privacy, there is practically none. The family live on top of one another in a single living-room, and in many cases parents and children have to share the same bedroom. Nor is it any use going outside to find occasional spaciousness or solitude. In our modern English towns, human beings are herded together, with the natural results of stunting and disease which occur when animals or plants are crowded too close.

The main burden of all this falls on the hardest worked, most responsible and probably most sensitive animal in the world—the woman. The English working-class woman, it has been well said, “combines in one tired personality the careers of mother, wife, nurse, cook, housemaid, bargain hunter, laundress and dressmaker.”<sup>1</sup> In some cases she has to be a wage-earner as well. If anybody in the world is indispensable, it is she. It isn't true in her case to say that her husband the wage-earner supports her: rather

by her labour she supports him and all her family. If she breaks down under the strain, the whole work of the household comes to a stop. If she dies, her husband marries again, for in no other way can he keep his home going.

This is the woman who has to breed and feed the bulk of the race. I believe that, for all her splendid courage and cheerfulness, we have laid a heavier burden on her shoulders than she is able adequately to support, and that as a result the race is suffering spiritually and physically. She cannot normally maintain a healthy and contented home under such disadvantages. The war showed us, to our alarm, how we had become physically a C3 nation. The causes are obvious. Take only one of them—food. A century and a half ago we were reputed to be the best fed race in the world. To-day, though our northerners with their love of oatmeal and their stronger tradition of wholesome cooking are probably superior in this respect to our southerners, we are one of the worst fed races in the civilized world—not in quantity, but in quality. Inferior foodstuffs—stale cheese, gritty sugar, strong margarine, jam made without enough fruit, and condensed milk instead of fresh milk—have become the staple dietary of all too many of our people; a people who, formerly bred on English beef and beer and corn, were for sturdy physique and energy the envy of the world. Apart from the crippling effect of her limited financial resources, the ordinary English housewife (in the south, at any rate) knows neither how to buy good food nor how to cook it when she has got it. Nor can one blame her. In a former



## WOMEN'S YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

age, the fine tradition of English marketing and cooking was handed from mother to daughter. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution that tradition was broken, partly by the appalling conditions of living in the new towns, and partly by the temporary epidemic of child labour that sent a whole generation of little girls into mine and mill. The girls of that generation had no chance to learn the life-giving arts of keeping house and wholesome feeding, and they could not give their daughters what they themselves had never received. Miss England, in fact, had lost her dowry, and she still lacks it.

A French housewife, however poor, knows how to make savoury stews and sauces, and cook omelettes and vegetables and the like, that will be (as all good food is) a stimulus and a joy to her menfolk and her children who consume it. Cooking like that oils the wheels of life, promotes health and contentment and good humour. Living on chemicalized and synthetic foods, ill-cooked, flavourless vegetables, and cheap, stale cakes, breeds, as Mr. Wells has shown in *Mr. Polly*, dyspepsia, ill-temper, and misery. Where the remedy lies, I leave it to other wiser heads than I to discuss. If I might make a suggestion, it might simplify the problem if it were only possible for people of limited means in England to dine occasionally in a restaurant where they could taste for themselves really good cooking as it is so easily and pleasantly possible in countries like France. (Here our English conservatism and hatred of eating in public, and our love of caging ourselves in our own houses is a serious drawback.) Probably, as with most of

## MODERN PROSE

our social problems, the task of finding a remedy must lie with our schools—and with those devoted men and women, the teachers, on whom it seems to me we lay the chief burden of maintaining our civilization. And here I might add that the date of Alfred's birth, the names of Shakespeare's successors, and the list of imports from Jamaica, are of very little use to the future wives and mothers of England if they do not also learn how to shop and cook to the best advantage allowed by their limited means. And while some are considering the best ways to enlarge those means, the most profitable line of thought for most of us is probably how to make them go as far as possible. Two and a half centuries ago, a great Englishman, asking what should his country do to be saved, said, "England, look to thy moat." In the same idiom, I would like to echo to-day, "England, look to thy kitchen."

But man does not live by bread alone. I have spoken of the inconvenience of the average English home—the workroom as it were of the English housewife. What of its lack of all that makes life gracious and lovely? For if it is right to describe woman as the custodian of civilization—the civilizer in every home in the land—what are we to say of the spiritual background of the modern English housewife? It is difficult to conceive of a more joyless life than hers—shut up in over close proximity to her fellow creatures in a little house in a back street, subjected to ceaseless work, and with nothing to look forward to but an old-age pension, the workhouse, or a tiny bedroom in a son or grandson's house at

## WOMEN'S YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

the end of it all. (It is difficult also to think of a life led with grander courage, lit as it is in spite of all by that wonderfully English humour, so ironical and so fundamentally kindly and philosophical, that is the peculiar heritage of our working people.) For her the sun seldom shines, the treasures of music, literature, and art are hidden, and the very freshness of the air withheld. Even religion has been largely taken from her by the pessimistic rationalism of modern life. Yet offer her a glimpse of colour and light, and, after that first initial distrust which all English people show towards things unfamiliar, she turns to it like a flower to the sun. It is sometimes my lot to produce pageants, and much the most wonderful thing about such work to me—especially those in urban districts like the Naval Pageant at Greenwich—is the way in which working-class women, whose lives have been painfully starved of such things, throw themselves with enthusiasm into the business of making coloured dresses, acting, singing, and above all into the companionship which such activities produce. There lies the real need of England; to restore a spiritual life to its people and most of all to its womenfolk, for if you starve the souls of its mothers, you starve the whole race.

*The National Character.* 1934.

## XV

ADRIAN BELL

### The Country Life: Bee-keeping

[A chapter from a collection of East Anglian sketches giving the author's experiences and reflections as a farmer. Here Mr. Bell wafts us away to a dreaming land of the past, and conveys to us something of his gentle, old-fashioned philosophy.]

BEES are a gift of the air, coming to hang like a monstrous fruit under the blossoms of May. Of all who keep bees and belong to that devoted brotherhood of hive-watchers, how many have not started fortuitously by the arrival of a swarm about their heads, literally "out of the blue"?

That was how it happened to us. It was a Saturday afternoon. The week's work on the farm was over—the horses grazed in the meadows; pigs were littered with straw; mangolds had been ground for the cattle; and now, after lunch, my pocket-book depleted with paying wages but my heart light, I composed myself in a chair in the sun to the full rich idleness of the labouring man till tea-time.

But hark! A growing murmur in the old cherry tree; a million motes were zigzagging in the clear air above me. I stirred hastily to escape visitation, but even as I did so I saw a black wen big as my fist on the underside of a bough,

## BEE-KEEPING

and was held fascinated, watching it grow, while the summer died away above. On the face of it it looked an impossibility, a flouting of the laws of gravitation, but there the bees all hung in the shape of a bunch of grapes, tapering, pendulous, swaying slightly with the bough, a creeping, shimmering multitude each supporting and supported by his fellows.

How was it that the queen and her immediate hangers-on were not smothered? How did they bear the weight of all the rest and not lose hold of the bough? Such questions were undertones of wonder to a mercenary jingle that kept running in my head:

A swarm in May  
Is worth a load of hay.

I saw, with an uncomfortable conscience, the ghost of the aged man who had acquainted me with that rhyme, admonishing my inertia with it and pointing his stick at the swarm.

"They'll stay there a while," I thought, moving my chair; "till next morning, probably."

"Not when the sun shines so warm," the shade answered.

"In any case I've no hive."

"A box would do to make shift."

I sat and watched while the inward debate went on, and a vague compulsion grew against my natural indolence and timidity.

Just as I rose up determined to do something the swarm dissolved away into the air again, and the postman came along the garden path with a telegram. The telegram I was expecting, and I knew its contents—the bees engaged both our

## MODERN PROSE

attentions, booming away to the meadow in a shadowy skein. When I say "postman," I mean postman rather by accident of uniform. Intrinsically he was a visionary-looking old countryman. His garden was templed with a few straw bee-skeps.

"Have you a tin can and a key?" he asked breathlessly.

"What for?"

"Quick, or they'll be gone," he commanded; so I rushed in, seized a frying-pan from my astonished wife's grasp, pulled the great key from the back-door lock, and thrust them at him. He immediately began beating the one upon the other and ran off after the bees. I followed as far as the top meadow, where I had a view of him with his face raised to the sky stumbling over clod and furrow, through hedges, over ditches, and away, away, never ceasing his tattoo. Even when he was out of sight I still heard his ting-ting-ting faintly through the idle afternoon like some ancient tocsin of alarm. Any week-ender who might have met the postman rushing about the fields with these domestic implements must have wondered at the frenzies indigenous to village life. It seemed a long time before he returned, dishevelled and broiled in his thick serge uniform—but without the bees, or knowledge of their whereabouts. This tintinnabulation of his was supposed to be a specific against an escaping swarm, causing it immediately to settle. But the magic hadn't worked—not for the first time, I expect, though nothing apparently could shake his faith in it.

I recompensed him with beer for his zealous,

## BEE-KEEPING

if unavailing, performance, and being refreshed he went on his way.

The next morning, which was Sunday, there came to me a man from the next village, of about the same age as the postman, but with an eye as keen as the other's was bemused and superstitious. His square, black Sabbath suit misfitted him with a peculiar dignity. He'd heard, he said, as how I'd lost a swarm.

Well, yes, I answered, in a sense, if its hanging for an hour from my cherry tree constituted that I'd ever had it.

It had settled, he said, on one of his bushes, and he'd "taken" it in a box, and there it was waiting for me if I'd care to take it home.

I thanked him, telling him also, as though to put a little more claim to it, how our postman had chased it throughout the latter part of yesterday afternoon, making a noise to it by striking a key upon a frying-pan.

Whereupon his lean face grizzled up in contemptuous laughter, hollowing his keen eyes yet deeper under his brow.

"He might just as well try to catch a bird by putting salt on its tail," he said.

I had heard of this man, though I had not met him before. His name was John Pready, and I had heard that he had been a shoemaker, and knew something about bees.

So I went along with him, and from his conversation it soon became apparent that he was to the postman what science is to superstition. He was old and bent, dry as withe unbound from a twelvemonth faggot, but by dint of making his legs very busy he walked very quickly, so that

## MODERN PROSE

I had to stir mine, that usually go in a pacing, indolent fashion, to keep up with him. When I came to his plot of land—which was not far across the fields—I found a number of modern hives ranged under the hedge, newly painted white miniature chalets, overlooking the foot-high forest of his clover crop.

The swarm which was "mine" was contained in an inverted box on a board with two pieces of stick keeping a gap at one edge, between which bees kept taking the air and alighting.

One's first swarm is apt to seem rather an embarrassment at first sight. Mine did, particularly as my guide initiated me into the craft amid the maze of aerial traffic of the hives, and my attention was taken up in dodging his bees—of which he took no notice whatever—rather than in laying up his directions about mine.

He talked a long time about the hives, absent-mindedly brushing a bee from the back of his hand or his coat now and then. He told me what to do with the swarm and how it would increase, and of what absorbing interest I should find bee-keeping to become. Not least, he tried to dispel any fears I might have shown as to the main lay notion of bees—their desire to sting. They were really gentle, peaceable creatures, he said, and only stung as a last resort.

"But," he warned me, "they take a dislike to any one smelling of drink." This was a disappointment, as bees are mostly a hot-weather job, and there is no refreshment, I think, like a glass of beer.

"Now, you'll need a hive," he said.

I suggested (with a mental view of the post-



## BEE-KEEPING

man's garden) a straw skep, as being both cheap and traditional, but he condemned this idea utterly as false economy, for with a skep you have to smoke the swarm to death to take the honey—which is even then of very poor quality owing to the breed being mixed up in it. A modern hive, on the other hand, allowed of free manipulation from above, and of taking the honey with little disturbance to the tenants—and what pure clear honey! Did I not know those squares of comb honey, so expensive and so beautiful on the breakfast-table? Those were easily obtainable from the modern hive, he told me. At that I agreed to the extra outlay, and his disappointment at my suggestion out of the dark ages after his highly technical instructions was appeased.

He made hives, he said, and could provide me with one at a third less than they would charge me at a shop. In fact, he happened to have one by him all ready painted, if I'd care to see it.

He took me round behind a shed, and there one glistened in the sun, a white, Lilliputian palace.

I took it home on my shoulder, complete with all its interior furnishings—which was a sufficient load for one person over fields—and set it in the orchard and arranged its storeys.

Admittedly it was Sunday, but, though it is blasphemy to meddle in arable activities on that day, it is proper to attend to one's livestock, and no sin to hive a swarm, particularly in the evening when the Sabbath calm begins to wear a little thin.

So I returned to John Pready in the evening as he had instructed. He wore his daily coat over his Sunday trousers and was waiting by the

## MODERN PROSE

swarm. Very gently he took the sticks from beneath the box and lowered it on to the board. As it touched, the swarm inside gave a sharp "Z; zz!" as much as to say, "Ho, there, what are you up to?"

Then he swathed the whole thing up in a white cloth and knotted the top, as though it were a pudding. And so, lifting it, board and all, he started off, I following with certain paraphernalia, till we reached the orchard.

The hive entrance was regulated by sliding shutters. We opened the portals their widest, laid a board sloping up to them from the ground, having first spread a white cloth there lest any should fall and perish in the forest of grass. I must mow the grass, he said.

He lifted the box and showed me the swarm sleeping suspended in a lump from the roof. Then he jerked it violently on to the board, where it shattered into a black bewildered horde creeping in all directions. But taking the smoker from my hands he puffed them into unanimity. They turned and marched up the slope like an army of slaves dragging a single block to the building of the pyramids. I found a sense of power out of proportion to their size and mass in watching them, as in men all at one purpose. And men, when they work in unanimous myriads like that, are no more than this multitude of bees, crawling on the face of the earth, building up they know not why. Only the individual is transcendent, sitting aloof with his faculties balanced and true to him, his instinct seeking the stars for touchstone, or sitting alone in his garden enjoying the godhead of observation of hurried lesser life.

## BEE-KEEPING

Thus was my first swarm hived ; and whenever in after-life this subject of bees recurs I am flashed back to that dusk—it is the little play for ever acted in the scene of “summer evening,” when stillness endows the lightest leaf with a quality of endurance transcending its nature—a fixity of iron wrought with art.

And again in the broad day—still in the thick and fretted scene of summer, I see myself and John Pready wearing that hermaphrodite garb of veil, white gloves, straw hats (Pready wore an old one of his wife’s), and trousers tied at the boots, which somehow seemed to connect us with the Morris dancers and the robust yet beribboned masquerade of antique joy. We bore in the oozing combs, while the orchard shade was all a-murmur around us. The kitchen reeked of sweetness while we extracted the honey and put it into the pots ; and afterwards, when at last the table was cleared, we sat and had tea, John Pready, Nora and I, with some of the new honey in a brown bowl, on the flavour of which John would give his opinion, whether it were clover-honey, or willow-honey, or ivy-honey, or what.

For my single hive in a year or two had increased to six, and I graduated from John’s scholar to his colleague, and we would meet and chat about our hives as two kings might discuss their subjects—how some were orderly and loyal, while others were malcontents and openly hostile to our will. Like Pharaoh, we stored during plenty against famine and provided for our peoples.

Nor was our state without enemies. The yellow peril was as real to us as to the greater world ; for

## MODERN PROSE

the wasps would descend in sudden hordes to kill and plunder. Many fierce battles have been fought at the portals of the hives, leaving the ground thick with dead.

John had a dozen hives in all, but these represented merely his tenacity of purpose, not the sum of his experience. For he would tell us of his life as we sat at tea in our farm kitchen, how he had started as a village shoemaker as his father had been, the top of whose head bent over his work used to be regarded almost as part of the bay window of his shop to those who passed by—which turned from black to white in that position in course of time, to be replaced at last by the red-haired pate of his son. He used to make the best pair of boots for fifteen shillings obtainable hereabouts, Walter assured me, a pair which, if regularly greased, would keep out the wet for twelve months. Seeing that the labourer is walking all winter in a saturated dough of clay, and all summer first through dew-drenched meadow, then over rock-baked fallow, that speaks well for a pair of boots.

But whether one generation of crumpling of the chest over work was visited on the next or not, John Pready, while yet young, fell into a decline, and was told by the doctor if he would save his life he must live it in the open air. But what shall it profit a man if he save his life and lose his livelihood? was the question that haunted him as he sat in the healing sun one day in May. Whereat the air grew murmurous as though in answer, and bees flew down from the sky through a space between the apple trees, and swarmed upon a currant bush close before him.

## BEE-KEEPING

From that swarm he built up a colony of a hundred hives, and engaged in all the business that experts engage in—sending hives to the moors when the heather was in bloom, selling queens, swarms, and supplying a large London store regularly with the bulk of his honey. He showed me a photograph—now sallow and shiny—of his larger field regimented with hives like a municipal housing scheme, and himself in the middle, wearing the straw hat and white ducks which are the beekeeper's uniform and make him a figure of optimism in our preponderantly grey and boisterous calendar.

That was his zenith. Disease was reported from the Isle of Wight, and year by year John Pready found it spreading closer about his East Anglian retreat. It came at last, and left every hive dead and silent to the clarion sun of May.

Everything had to be destroyed. When he had burnt all his hives he farmed his land as a small-holder for a few years. Then, one day, he found a swarm hanging from the handle of his plough as he led his horses out after dinner. He tied up his horses at a safe distance, took it, and started to build up his colony of bees again.

Now he had twelve hives. For, like a bee himself, he was patient and blindly pertinacious. All summer he would be swinging his long scythe—stooping low over it—mowing the grass in front of his hives, that it should not impede their coming and going. Did he ever once straighten himself and look over to the horizon? I don't think so. He was like a man looking through a microscope; his vistas were all an intensification of the minute; as he manipulated his doll's houses

## MODERN PROSE

of hives, floor by floor, sometimes piling storey upon storey till there were skyscrapers in Lilliput, driving his fingers to the very ultimate sanctuary of the community, the royal boudoir—cutting out queen cells to prevent them swarming. That was ever his preoccupation in the spring, to stop these lyric, these wasteful love-flights, to keep them to the task of honey, honey, honey. A jealous god.

His maxim was "Take time by the forelock." He was always coming out with it. It was the watchword of his bee-craft. He also repeated to me a wish latterly—a very bee-like wish—that he should "die in harness."

He became ill, and I watched his hives for him, for it was spring. I used to sit by his bed and report to him on the state of his hives, while he lay in a flannel nightshirt buttoned up to his neck, looking out of the window which showed only the sky from where he lay, gazing for the first time in his life, I think, on the passing pageant of the clouds. "In bee-keeping," he said for the last time to me, though I believe he thought it was the first, "there's one great thing to remember, 'Take time by the forelock.'"

I was making an artificial shower of rain with a syringe and a pail of water out of a cloudless sky, which caused an absconding swarm to settle, which I captured and made ready for his thirteenth hive, when he died. For, though he smiled when I returned, it was not at my news. I saw by the fixity of his eyes towards the window that the clouds had beckoned him away at last.

We planted a willow over his grave, for that is the first thing bees come to in spring, and if they

## BEE-KEEPING

know anything (and who knows how little or how great their apprehension?) they may guess that thereunder lies a Bee Master and a Master Bee.

Thereafter I backslid. For the swarm I had taken for his thirteenth hive was gone when I came to hive them. "But there's no accounting for bees," I told myself, looking at the deserted beginnings of comb under the lid of the box. I spoke of it to the postman when I went for the afternoon post.

"Oh, but of course," he said, "why, of course—they'd be sure to go. You see, you never told them of his death. If any one dies in the house and you don't tell the bees, they won't stay."

And yet I couldn't scorn this old fellow, with his dark certainties and his ridiculous tinklings after bees that were really in his own bonnet. The old moralist bid us go to the bees for an example, but to one who has seen a little of the modern world their whole polity seems designed by God as a warning against the very contingency to which civilization is now come.

For if you "understand" bees as John Pready "understood" them, and ever pause to look at the sky above, you realize what a blind alley of communistic effort their race represents. They are but another of nature's disillusionings. Blindly they serve the modern honey-factory, one grain of love in a desert of labour is their lot—honey is taken from them and they make more, and then when winter comes accept syrup for food.

Our postman said little as a rule, and then only when questioned. "Isle of Wight disease? Never heard of it. My bees? No, I never lost none. John Pready's? Why, of course they

## MODERN PROSE

died ; he used to feed 'em on syrup and faked-up stuff all winter, and in they cold wooden hives. It's unnatural—stand to reason they died. You can't do just as you like with bees. They be wonderful chancy things ; you can't ever get to the bottom of they."

And that is why, from my modern bee-keeping, I often look over the hedge at the straw-templed nook in the postman's garden, as one full-fed with scientific formulæ may look back on Eden, when darkness was a presence and Adam stood in awe of an ordaining Hand. For our postman's bees are endowed with a spirit and a caprice ; they are his neighbours not his slaves. If any in the house dies he tells them of it ; if they fly away he makes them a tinkling noise to charm them home. His lore is so immemorial as to make "science" seem an unmannerly upstart cocking snooks at venerable men. Virgil was persuaded of it, and the ancient Greeks, who endued bees with the gift of oratory. Did not a swarm of bees alight on the infant Plato ? Did not Mahomet admit them to Paradise ? And Porphyry says of fountains, "They are adapted to the nymphs, or those souls which the ancients called bees."

Like a wise man, our postman admits of understanding less as he grows older. Least of all would he admit to stealing bees. One continues, of course, with one's modern utility hives, but his straw skeps with their Gothic curve are like the temples of some picturesque old faith. And, oh, who nowadays wouldn't prefer to be—as he is—still on the side of the angels ?

*The Cherry Tree.* 1932.



## XVI

PETER QUENNEL

### 1. The Country near Peking

[Sketches from a travel book depicting China and Japan as seen by an educated Englishman who enjoys sensation and interpretation more than economic facts.]

A SINGLE occasion ; but I have chosen to describe it because it shines with an especially distinct lustre. It seems typical somehow, as I look back, of our memories of Peking and the Chinese, long broken-fronted dusty Chinese streets and plump-sedate or ragged-obstreperous passers-by, empty palaces and winged towers falling to ruin. . . .

Beyond the walls, you are at once in the open country, and far ahead over a grey expanse of fields—deep luxuriant green during the summer—stretches a fragile and lovely line of rambling hilltops, the Western Hills with the Summer Palace at their feet and many temples half hidden among their folds. It is here you drive out in the warm months. There are few roads in the vicinity of Peking—few, at least, that an English motorist would acknowledge—and the car struggles and bumps down a shallow water-course or jolts along a pitted and ruined track, made rougher by huge irregularly jointed flag-stones.

In the summer, you meet strings of desert camels. These dark brown thick-coated solemn

## MODERN PROSE

beasts are driven in from the remote regions in which they herd, and carry sacks of coal and even sandwich boards. They are too stupid to be much frightened by the car, and pass with that sibilant wheezing and snorting which is peculiar to camels all over the world. Their peaked humps sag and sway at every stride, and behind them their long-legged and woolly calves, already wearing an expression of imbecile arrogance, hold up their thin scrawny birdlike necks.

Sometimes a procession fills the road. It was an April morning, and we had just left the city gate, on our way to a hot spring in the country where there is a restaurant, a bath-house, and a little park. Our road was a hollow track between fields, and through the haggard diffused glare of a sudden dust-storm shadowy figures wavered ahead in a long line. First antiquated pillbox carriages, jolting and bumping, which contained silent personages dressed in white; then a litter, a sort of crazy palanquin, which lurched forward on the shoulders of ragged coolies who wore green and red coats and black hats, each hat with a broken bedraggled feather. A funeral; the red-domed palanquin sheltered the wooden coffin of the deceased, who had evidently been respectable and well-to-do. Perhaps thirty men puffed and sweated under its shafts; and as many more, with no visible occupation, kept them company in straggling array. Some, red-coated, bore wands of white paper; next a paper horse and cart and a paper servant—the servant had a grey trilby on his head—were carried along, to be burnt during the ceremony, as an economical substitute for a genuine holocaust. Mythological animals of

## NEAR PEKING

moss and wicker—birds and lions were chiefly represented—came tagging after a paper sedan chair, empty, but adorned by a large wreath.

There was much else ; I have forgotten the other accessories, and what I remember is a strange and tattered frieze, slipshod and phantasmal amid the dust which blew in a gritty hurricane across the road and gave the ragged coats and soiled plumes of the swarming bearers, the lurching bulk of the enormous palanquin, a ghostly vagueness appropriate to the occasion, as though the dead man had already begun on earth his journey through the twilight of the nether world.

Our car hooted impatiently in the rear, then inch by inch pushed its way towards the front. No one appeared to resent this interruption : mourners and bearers were chatting and joking among themselves, spitting and breaking step and falling out. There was no dignity, no attempt at perfect drilling ; it was as informal and inconsequent as a dream and, for that reason, maybe, the more impressive. The great processions of the Middle Ages were like that, and even to-day the solemnities of the Roman Church are enacted with the same disregard for detail. . . .

The cortège seemed endless as we edged by ; but, at last, we were clear of it on the open road. We bathed that morning in deliciously warm water which bubbles up into covered cement cisterns, and ate a meal, very good and very large, among other dishes some dark green ancient eggs, tasting of the scum on a mantled pond. After lunch we had meant to walk across the park ; but there was a soldier with a fixed

## MODERN PROSE

bayonet at the gate and a surly official, in a pay-box, who demanded an entrance fee. The local general, explained a waiter at the hotel, had decided to collect an arbitrary "squeeze"; so we turned away and set off into the country, making for a rocky bluff above a village.

On the hilltop was an edifice that suggested a fort. We climbed up and saw that it was a temple. A square of buildings surrounded a small yard, and at the back, under a dilapidated penthouse, sat a placid family party of crumbling gods with smooth egg-shaped faces and affectionate smiles. Rubbish heaped the altar around their feet, and the roof was falling down upon their heads. There were many names scratched largely over the plaster and, though some incense sticks had recently been set burning and their fine heavy ash spattered the floor, the whole place smelt of mildew and decay.

Behind the temple was a narrow grassy platform, fringing a precipice which dropped sheer into the plain. A tranquil, rather misty afternoon; beneath us, the tawny-pallid earth, tilled minutely as far as the eye could reach, so that it resembled the ribbed texture of a coarse fabric, rolled off towards a distant line of hills, towards another village set about with smoky trees, islanded in the huge monotony of furrowed soil. A hazy golden light suffused the landscape and its mountainous edge, across the sweep of hollow plain, was barely indicated, like the background of a Sung picture. Faint paths strayed diagonally through the fields, reminding me of the seams in a piece of cloth; and whitish smears—streaks of salt or lime—resembled a discoloration in the weave.

## NEAR PEKING

Two wagons were moving along a path, and farther away there were some pack-horses upon a trail. Seen from above, they progressed with painful slowness, little carts dragging and bumping towards the horizon, sending up to us the sharp whine of their wooden hubs, no objective in sight before the village, and that many miles still to go. Hubs squeaking, a whip cracking, dogs barking. A pair of large curly-tailed dogs raced in a broad ellipse over the fields, making tracks of white dust as they revolved. Another cart, moving in the opposite direction, met and passed the two carts I had first noticed.

Our point of view was Olympian from the hill-top ; and here, if this book were written in French, some magniloquent commonplace might be introduced—for the edification of a hypothetical reader, himself sensitive to the charm of lonely landscapes, the air of utter tedium they exhale, as haunting as the long story of an obscure life. Commonplace, certainly, were the emotions it aroused ; but then commonplace emotions are sometimes the strongest, if only because we are obliged to enjoy them in secret. I pretended to be unaffected by what we saw, and tried to remember some verses I had once read, a fragment of a seventeenth-century poem—perhaps Joseph Beaumont's laborious arid *Psyche*, though I have never yet traced them to their source :

Huge plains and lowly cottages forlorn,  
Rounded about by the vast wavering sky. . . .

I thought that they epitomized the present scene ; but my companion, when I repeated them for his benefit, said doubtfully that he did not think

them very good. I said that I thought "wavering" was expressive. . . . We both got up and started to walk down the hill.

## 2. The Dancing of Kikugoro

Dancing in Japan is still spontaneous. Thus, in the country—at the feast of departed souls, when lighted lanterns are set afloat upon the lake and come glimmering under the piers of the wooden bridge, drawn down by the waterfall beyond the rapids as it plunges from a rocky shelf towards the plain—the village people and the foreigners' servants collect at night and dance endlessly round the musicians' platform, two concentric rings meeting and parting, with a slow sideways step and deliberate gestures which seem to appeal to the enormous fellowship of the dead. . . .

A Japanese dance inclines to gravity and deliberation, whether it be the dance before an obscure local shrine or a *pas seul*, behind harsh electric footlights, by Kikugoro, the best-known of modern dancers. Its rhythm is perceptible but very slow—a quality which may ultimately become attractive but is at first somewhat baffling and monotonous. For most Westerners the idea of graceful movement is connected with a certain idea of speed. We are apt to recognize the essential beauty of a dance not so much in the separate positions of the performer as in the invisible line that gathers them into one—in the cursive rather than in the static aspect. What our eyes follow is a subtly involved pattern marked

## DANCING OF KIKUGORO

out by perpetually moving hands and feet. Posture flows so rapidly into posture ; the effect of the dancing is hardly distinct from the effect of the music ; and the whole impression, by being always a little confused, is apt to suggest more than it really states.

But now imagine on the stage of the Kabuki-za the first appearance of Kikugoro from the wings. The stage itself is enormous and quite empty, except for the orchestra squatting motionless among their instruments. . . . Suddenly, saluted by a roar of welcome, he runs forth—almost scuttles—into the light, with bent knees and faltering feminine steps, timorous and irresistible at the same time, a perfect embodiment of frightened seductive womanhood, as though he were blown in like a feather or a dead leaf, his face, wonderfully dwarfed by the blue-black *coiffure*, swaying backwards and forwards while he moves, his skirts hissing and bundling around his feet, his sandals pattering audibly across the boards.

It would seem that the intention with which he sets out is to impress us not by any parade of strength, but by the fluidity, the gracious limpness, of his entire demeanour. From this beginning he proceeds—but very gradually—to develop the elaborate rhythms of the dance. He unwinds, as one unwinds a skein of silk, the fragile unbroken strand that threads his postures, a clue always there but so transparent that a Western eye, in losing and picking it up again, grows bewildered long before the end ; sleeves flapping, fan opening, *coiffure* bending, all underlined by the acid music of smitten strings.

His pendant sleeves, pliable and loose, long

## MODERN PROSE

enough nearly to sweep the ground, are managed with consummate delicacy and rightness, a ghostly extension of the arm and hand that move them, as they flick over in a rapid glistening arc or droop and sway like foliage against the wind. Instead of a body which dances inside its trappings, here is a dancer whose voluminous clinging robes are the expression, the final triumph, of his virtuosity. Though Western dancing—and Western art in every form—cannot forget the splendour of the naked animal, nakedness from the point of view of Eastern races is unseemly, unappetizing, a trifle absurd. In pornography, perhaps, but not in art, the naked human body may have its charm; and dancers, unconcerned to show their muscles, delight us by the fold and flow of heavy stuffs.

Among the Chinese, this principle is carried further, and the body as far as possible melts away, leaving only the soft outline of its dress. Mei-lan-fang, at his suavest and most accomplished, has a gracefulness so exaggeratedly inhuman that every posture suggests a miracle of calligraphy, produced by a single sweep of some clever brush rather than supported on a crude framework of bone and sinew. He is *all* dress, like the ladies of Chinese porcelains, bedizened head, pointed expressive nails, and under them a mere wraith of floating drapery, a ghost, an emanation of spirit drawn upward by the shrill ascent of his own song.

Less ethereal are the posturings of Kikugoro. Mei-lan-fang in private life is slight and willowy; but the Japanese dancer, when he appears in ordinary garb, is revealed as a short and solid



## DANCING OF KIKUGORO

person with thick bandy legs and muscular arms. His dancing, for all its characteristic delicacy, has a precision and a degree of accomplishment which are wholly masculine. Great strength and the devoted labour of many years have gone into the proper handling of his heavy robe, of the fan or the umbrella which he carries. Not one robe, but often four or five, provide an obstacle which his skill must overcome. . . . I am thinking particularly of the so-called Heron Dance, when he slips free of one kimono after another like an insect brilliantly emerging from successive chrysalises, reborn, as he steps clear, in a new mood.

He is the phantom of a young girl, crazed with love; he is also a heron, and in the stately plumage of the bird postures the hopeless melancholy of old desire, beneath moonlight which is shining vaguely through the mist. Japanese art and the Japanese temperament are full of phantoms. From the earliest period, this active and excitable race have relished dim woolgathering among the shades, have talked of ghosts and taken pleasure in quiet melancholy, imagining the intense loneliness of the world to come. Loneliness, if one can judge from artistic evidence, must be an obsession, a haunting fear of the Japanese. There are the "hungry ghosts" of a famous painted scroll; and there are the forlorn children, tormented after death, who require the special comfort of a benign Jizo. A lonely race; and the rhythm of the Heron Dance is of a loneliness pitched in a phantasmal key, purified and attenuated by the power of art till it is no more than the lyric abstraction of real suffering.

The music, though not important in itself,

## MODERN PROSE

combines admirably with the plaintive measures of the ballet. Samisen music, melancholy at its most cheerful, has for such occasions an unbearably appealing note. Bitter-sweet at its sweetest to the Western taste, it acquires a poignancy that plays direct upon the nerves, wailing gushes that have no origin and no sequel but expire suddenly like the sound of wind in an autumn reed-bed, sharp cries that quaver off into utter silence, and low vibrations that murmur lengthily within the ear. This accompaniment, to the untrained foreign listener, makes promises which it very seldom keeps. It is exciting but seldom or never satisfying, prodigal of hints which drop stillborn into the brain, of dead-ends and barren clues which lead him nowhere. Similarly the dance, however delightful at a given moment, seems to be lacking in any obvious connecting line. The eye, which follows the dancer as he moves, fixes a posture and hurries on to catch the next.

A series of postures, separate shapes along a frieze; I remember the fluttering dance of the ghostly heron and his last entry, the *crescendo* of the whole dance, when Kikugoro stands forth all in white—a heavy white silk kimono with scarlet linings—hooded in white, rather squat, with his huge umbrella, but giving off an odd phosphorescent gleam, insect-like, or grub-like in his pallid thickness, slowly pivoting, slowly sinking towards the ground, while the translucent disc of the paper sunshade slowly revolves. . . .

*A Superficial Journey through Tokyo and Peking.*  
1932.

## XVII

T. S. ELIOT

### I. Acquaintance with Poetry

[The first passage tells, in an aside from the main thesis of a book putting the author's anti-romantic attitude as a critic, of Mr. Eliot's own early experience of poetry and his deductions from it. The second, from a course of lectures delivered at an American university, gives Mr. Eliot's estimate, from the angle of one who is "Anglo-Catholic, classic, and monarchist" in sympathies, of two great figures in modern literature, of the diametrically opposite school.]

I MAY be generalizing my own history unwarrantably, or on the other hand I may be uttering what is already a commonplace amongst teachers and psychologists, when I put forward the conjecture that the majority of children, up to say twelve or fourteen, are capable of a certain enjoyment of poetry; that at or about puberty the majority of these find little further use for it, but that a small minority then find themselves possessed of a craving for poetry which is wholly different from any enjoyment experienced before. I do not know whether little girls have a different taste in poetry from little boys, but the responses of the latter I believe to be fairly uniform. *Horatius*, *The Burial of Sir John Moore*, *Bannockburn*, Tennyson's *Revenge*, some of the Border ballads; a liking for martial and sangui-

## MODERN PROSE

nary poetry is no more to be discouraged than engagements with lead soldiers and pea-shooters. The only pleasure that I got from Shakespeare was the pleasure of being commended for reading him; had I been a child of more independent mind I should have refused to read him at all. Recognizing the frequent deceptions of memory, I seem to remember that my early liking for the sort of verse that small boys do like vanished at about the age of twelve, leaving me for a couple of years with no sort of interest in poetry at all. I can recall clearly enough the moment when, at the age of fourteen or so, I happened to pick up a copy of Fitzgerald's *Omar* which was lying about, and the almost overwhelming introduction to a new world of feeling which this poem was the occasion of giving me. It was like a sudden conversion; the world appeared anew, painted with bright, delicious, and painful colours. Thereupon I took the usual adolescent course with Byron, Shelley, Keats, Rossetti, Swinburne.

I take this period to have persisted until about my twenty-second year. Being a period of rapid assimilation, the end may not know the beginning, so different may the taste become. Like the first period of childhood, it is one beyond which I daresay many people never advance; so that such taste for poetry as they retain in later life is only a sentimental memory of the pleasures of youth, and is probably entwined with all our other sentimental retrospective feelings. It is, no doubt, a period of keen enjoyment; but we must not confuse the intensity of the poetic experience in adolescence with the intense experience of poetry. At this period, the poem, or the poetry

## ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETRY

of a single poet, invades the youthful consciousness and assumes complete possession for a time. We do not really see it as something with an existence outside ourselves; much as in our youthful experiences of love, we do not so much see the person as infer the existence of some outside object which sets in motion these new and delightful feelings in which we are absorbed. The frequent result is an outburst of scribbling which we may call imitation, so long as we are aware of the meaning of the word "imitation" which we employ. It is not deliberate choice of a poet to mimic, but writing under a kind of dæmonic possession by one poet.

The third, or mature stage of enjoyment of poetry, comes when we cease to identify ourselves with the poet we happen to be reading; when our critical faculties remain awake; when we are aware of what one poet can be expected to give and what he cannot. The poem has its own existence, apart from us; it was there before us and will endure after us. It is only at this stage that the reader is prepared to distinguish between degrees of greatness in poetry; before that stage he can only be expected to distinguish between the genuine and the sham—the capacity to make this latter distinction must always be practised first. The poets we frequent in adolescence will not be arranged in any objective order of eminence, but by the personal accidents which put them into relation with us; and this is right. I doubt whether it is possible to explain to school children or even undergraduates the differences of degree among poets, and I doubt whether it is wise to try; they have not yet had enough

experiences of life for these matters to have much meaning. The perception of *why* Shakespeare, or Dante, or Sophocles holds the place he has is something which comes only very slowly in the course of living. And the deliberate attempt to grapple with poetry which is not naturally congenial, and some of which never will be, should be a very mature activity indeed; an activity which well repays the effort, but which cannot be recommended to young people without grave danger of deadening their sensibility to poetry and confounding the genuine *development* of taste with the sham acquisition of it.

It should be clear that the "development of *taste*" is an abstraction. To set before oneself the goal of being able to enjoy, and in the proper objective order of merit, all good poetry, is to pursue a phantom, the chase after which should be left to those whose ambition it is to be "cultivated" or "cultured," for whom art is a luxury article and its appreciation an accomplishment. For the development of genuine taste, founded on genuine feeling, is inextricable from the development of the personality and character. Genuine taste is always imperfect taste—but we are all, as a matter of fact, imperfect people; and the man whose taste in poetry does not bear the stamp of his particular personality, so that there are differences in what he likes from what we like, as well as resemblances, and differences in the way of liking the same things, is apt to be a very uninteresting person with whom to discuss poetry. We may even say that to have better "taste" in poetry than belongs to one's state of development, is not to

## ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETRY

"taste" anything at all. One's taste in poetry cannot be isolated from one's other interests and passions ; it affects them and is affected by them, and must be limited as one's self is limited.

I have not attempted any definition of poetry, because I can think of none which does not assume that the reader already knows what it is, or which does not falsify by leaving out much more than it can include. Poetry begins, I daresay, with a savage beating a drum in a jungle, and it retains that essential of percussion and rhythm ; hyperbolically one might say that the poet is *older* than other human beings—but I do not want to be tempted to make an ending on this sort of flourish. I have insisted rather on the variety of poetry, variety so great that all the kinds seem to have nothing in common except the rhythm of verse instead of the rhythm of prose : and that does not tell you much about all poetry. Poetry is of course not to be defined by its uses. If it commemorates a public occasion, or celebrates a festival, or decorates a religious rite, or amuses a crowd, so much the better. It may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed ; may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it. It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate ; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world. But to say all this is only to say

what you know already, if you have felt poetry and thought about your feelings.

*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism.* 1933.

## 2. Hardy and Lawrence: Rebels

When morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy—that is, of the habits of the community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the Church—and when each man is to elaborate his own, then *personality* becomes a thing of alarming importance.

The work of the late Thomas Hardy represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs; unhampered by any ideas, or even by what sometimes acts as a partial restraint upon inferior writers, the desire to please a large public. He seems to me to have written as nearly for the sake of 'self-expression' as a man well can; and the self which he had to express does not strike me as a particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication. He was indifferent even to the prescripts of good writing: he wrote sometimes overpoweringly well, but always very carelessly; at times his style touches sublimity without ever having passed through the stage of being good. In consequence of his self-absorption, he makes a great deal of landscape; for landscape is a passive creature which lends itself to an author's mood. Landscape is fitted too for the purposes of an author who is interested not at all in men's minds,



but only in their emotions ; and perhaps only in men as vehicles for emotions. It is only, indeed, in their emotional paroxysms that most of Hardy's characters come alive. This extreme emotionalism seems to me a symptom of decadence ; it is a cardinal point of faith in a romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake, whatever the emotion or whatever its object. But it is by no means self-evident that human beings are most real when most violently excited ; violent physical passions do not in themselves differentiate men from each other, but rather tend to reduce them to the same state ; and the passion has significance only in relation to the character and behaviour of the man at other moments of his life and in other contexts. Furthermore, strong passion is only interesting or significant in strong men ; those who abandon themselves without resistance to excitements which tend to deprive them of reason, become merely instruments of feeling and lose their humanity ; and unless there is moral resistance and conflict there is no meaning. But as the majority is capable neither of strong emotion nor of strong resistance, it always inclines to admire passion for its own sake, unless instructed to the contrary ; and, if somewhat deficient in vitality, people imagine passion to be the surest evidence of vitality. This in itself may go towards accounting for Hardy's popularity.

What again and again introduces a note of falsity into Hardy's novels is that he will leave nothing to nature, but will always be giving one last turn of the screw himself, and of his motives for so doing I have the gravest suspicion. In

*The Mayor of Casterbridge*—which has always seemed to me his finest novel as a whole—he comes the nearest to producing an air of inevitability, and of making the crises seem the consequences of the character of Henchard; the arrangement by which the hero, leaning over a bridge, finds himself staring at his effigy in the stream below is a masterly *tour de force*. This scene is, however, as much by arrangement as less successful ones in which the motive intrudes itself more visibly; as for instance the scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* in which Bathsheba unscrews Fanny Robin's coffin—which seems to me deliberately faked. And by this I mean that the author seems to be deliberately relieving some emotion of his own at the expense of the reader. It is a refined form of torture on the part of the writer, and a refined form of self-torture on the part of the reader.

I find this same strain in the work of a man whose morbidity I have already had occasion to mention, and whom I regard as a very much greater genius, if not a greater artist, than Hardy: D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence has three aspects, and it is very difficult to do justice to all. I do not expect to be able to do so. The first is the ridiculous: his lack of sense of humour, a certain snobbery, a lack not so much of information as of the critical faculties which education should give, and an incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking. Of this side of Lawrence, the brilliant exposure by Mr. Wyndham Lewis in *Paleface* is by far the most conclusive criticism that has been made. Secondly, there is the extraordinarily keen sensibility and capacity for

profound intuition—intuition from which he commonly drew the wrong conclusions. Third, there is a distinct sexual morbidity. Unfortunately, it is necessary to keep all of these aspects in mind in order to criticize the writer fairly; and this, in such close perspective, is almost impossible. I shall no doubt appear to give excessive prominence to the third; but that, after all, is what has been least successfully considered.

I have already touched upon the deplorable religious upbringing which gave Lawrence his lust for intellectual independence: like most people who do not know what orthodoxy is, he hated it. With the more intimate reasons, of heredity and environment, for eccentricity of thought and feeling I am not concerned: too many people have made them their business already. And I have already mentioned the insensibility to ordinary social morality, which is so alien to my mind that I am completely baffled by it as a monstrosity. The point is that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity. It was peculiarly so for Lawrence, who does not appear to have been gifted with the faculty of self-criticism, except in flashes, even to the extent of ordinary worldly shrewdness. Of divine illumination, it may be said that probably every man knows when he has it, but that any man is likely to think he has it when he has it not; and even when he has had it, the daily man that he is may draw the wrong conclusions from the enlightenment which the

## MODERN PROSE

momentary man has received : no one, in short, can be the sole judge of whence his inspiration comes. A man like Lawrence, therefore, with his acute sensibility, violent prejudices and passions, and lack of intellectual and social training, is admirably fitted to be an instrument for forces of good or for forces of evil ; or as we might expect, partly for one and partly for the other. A trained mind like that of Mr. Joyce is always aware what master it is serving ; an untrained mind, and a soul destitute of humility and filled with self-righteousness, is a blind servant and a fatal leader. It would seem that for Lawrence any spiritual force was good, and that evil resided only in the absence of spirituality. Most people, no doubt, need to be aroused to the perception of the simple distinction between the spiritual and the material ; and Lawrence never forgot, and never mistook, this distinction. But most people are only very little alive ; and to awaken them to the spiritual is a very great responsibility ; it is only when they are so awakened that they are capable of real Good, but that at the same time they become first capable of Evil. Lawrence lived all his life, I should imagine, on the spiritual level ; no man was less a sensualist. Against the living death of modern material civilization he spoke again and again, and even if these dead could speak, what he said is unanswerable. As a criticism of the modern world, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* is a book to keep at hand and re-read. In contrast to Nottingham, London, or industrial America, his capering redskins of *Mornings in Mexico* seem to represent Life. So they do ; but that is not the last word, only the first.

There is, I believe, a very great deal to be learned from Lawrence; though those who are most capable of exercising the judgment necessary to extract the lesson may not be those who are most in need of it. That we can and ought to reconcile ourselves to Liberalism, Progress, and Modern Civilization is a proposition which we need not have waited for Lawrence to condemn; and it matters a good deal in what name we condemn it. I fear that Lawrence's work may appeal, not to those who are well and able to discriminate, but to the sick and debile and confused; and will appeal not to what remains of health in them, but to their sickness. Nor will many even accept his doctrine as he would give it, but will be busy after their own inventions. The number of people in possession of any criteria for discriminating between good and evil is very small; the number of the half-alive hungry for any form of spiritual experience, or what offers itself as spiritual experience, high or low, good or bad, is considerable. My own generation has not served them very well. Never has the printing-press been so busy, and never have such varieties of buncombe and false doctrine come from it. *Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets have been like foxes in the waste places. . . . And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?*

*After Strange Gods. 1933*

## XVIII

BONAMY DOBRÉE

### The New Way of Writing

[From a general work of criticism dealing with the qualities of modern prose style, and illustrated from numerous authors, English and American.]

CAN we say that there is, definitely, "a new way of writing"? Is there such a thing as *modern* prose, with characteristics the older prose does not possess? <sup>1</sup> It may seem at first sight that the question cannot reasonably be put, for if we agreed that style is the personal voice—which pierces through even the "impersonal manner"—and that the voice is the man; and if we assume, as we plausibly can, that man does not alter except over very long periods, can we talk of a modern as opposed to an old-fashioned style?

One can make two answers to this. The first is, that though time may not change man physically, nor perhaps mentally, leaving his vocal chords and what he wants to do with them still the same, two things do change: the social being, and with him the method of speech he must use to be effective with other social beings. Man as a social animal alters in tune with what we call,

<sup>1</sup> I may suggest, to begin with, that had I been writing thirty years ago, I would probably have felt constrained to write "with characteristics *which* the older . . ."

## THE NEW WAY OF WRITING

since a better term is lacking, "the spirit of the age," which we gauge by the different approaches men make to the external universe, and, more important perhaps, to their own emotions. Man may be fundamentally unchanged, but in the social process of his time, different facets are polished, unfamiliar aspects emerge. To take a simple example: How would a fourteenth-century man react if he were asked to think of 'the wonders of the deep' compared with the way a twentieth-century man would react? To-day we should at once let our minds turn to what we might roughly call 'scientific marvels,' that is, to various detailed manifestations of fish life, or of corals. The fourteenth-century man would shudder deliciously at a vision of leviathans, appallingly, even incredibly shaped, of mermaids, of ghostly inhabitants. Not only, then, will men of various ages wish to express different things, but they will wish to impress men differently. What would be the good, for instance, of a member of the House of Lords rising up and saying:

My Lords, this ruinous and ignominious situation, where we cannot act with success nor suffer with honour, calls upon us to remonstrate in the strongest and loudest language of truth, to rescue the ears of majesty from the delusions which surround it.

We can imagine a peer having similar feelings about, perhaps, the situation in India, but such language, used by Chatham in 1777, would have no result whatever now, though in its way it is splendid, and in its own age was no doubt very effective indeed. Our second answer arises out of the first: since the needs of the voice have

## MODERN PROSE

changed, the instrument has been altered: we no longer use the same tool as our ancestors did to move other people. And there is still another consideration. If we use a different tool it is that our emotions have changed, or at any rate, if our emotions do not change, our attitude towards them differs with the age in which we live. These things, however, interact upon each other. We know, as once we did not know, that our emotions vary with the language we use in describing them: the spirit of an age may not only be reflected in its prose, it may be, indeed it is, to some extent conditioned by it.

Let us now take two passages, dealing with much the same range of ideas, written by men who were each in their day stylists. One writer is Sir Thomas Browne, the other William James, and I am taking Browne at his most straightforward.

Let thy studies be free as thy thoughts and contemplations: but fly not only upon the wings of imagination; join sense unto reason, and experiment unto speculation, and so give life unto embryon truths, and verities yet in their chaos. There is nothing more acceptable unto the ingenious world, than this noble eluctation of truth; wherein, against the tenacity of prejudice and prescription, this century now prevaieth.

That is from *Christian Morals*: now let us take this from *The Will to Believe*:

On the whole, then, we must conclude that no philosophy of ethics is possible in the old-fashioned absolute sense of the term. Everywhere the ethical philosopher must wait on facts. The thinkers who create the ideals come he knows not whence, their



## THE NEW WAY OF WRITING

sensibilities are evolved he knows not how ; and the question as to which of two conflicting ideals will give the best universe then and there, can be answered by him only through the aid of the experience of other men.

I take it that anybody, even neglecting Browne's obsolete forms, would at once recognize the first passage as belonging to the seventeenth century, and the second to our own time. Can we put our finger on where exactly the difference lies ?

It is pretty obvious that the difference lies in the rhythm, but that is too easy a thing to say : and as a matter of fact, if we analyse these two passages into " prose rhythms " in the way that Saintsbury did in his fascinating book, they are not, prosodically speaking at least, so different after all. Are not such cadences as

ēmbryōn | trūths, and | vērities | yēt in their | chāōs,  
and

ōld-fashioned | ābsōlute | sēnsē ōf thē | tērm,

of much the same order ? Both are, in a sense, dactylic. What is different is the way the metres are used. In modern writing there is far less insistence on the rhythms ; the unit into which the rhythms are woven, that is to say the phrase, is far more flexible, on the whole longer. The antithetical balance has gone. But what is more significant is that the written language to-day is much nearer the spoken language, with implications we shall follow up in a moment. . . .

What appears to have happened is that in the seventeenth century a profound division

developed between the spoken and the written language, a division bridged by the journalists and the comic writers. What seems to have occurred afterwards was that the journalists, forgetting Dryden, deserted to the written side: one has only to think of Addison, and then of Dr. Johnson, who, far from trying to write as he naturally spoke, did his best to model his conversation on his writing. Everybody remembers how he let slip the remark about *The Rehearsal* not having wit enough to keep it sweet, and then, recoiling in horror from so natural an expression, hurriedly amended the phrase to "has not vitality enough to preserve it from corruption." The stylists of the eighteenth century seem to have taken their writing farther and farther away from their speech—Gibbon, Burke, Smollett. This process went on through the nineteenth century; we have only to think of Carlyle or Pater, though it is true that some people all the while kept up the spoken tradition—Defoe, Sterne, and even Lamb, for though Lamb's style is artificial as regards words, his rhythms are those of his talk, or at any rate of his possible talk. What I think is going on at the present day is a return to speech rhythms; the conscious stylists are, so to speak, ridding themselves of "style"; not "style," but *a* style is what they are aiming at, a style that will faithfully reflect their mind as it utters itself naturally. . . .

Does it not seem, then, that the modern prose-writer, in returning to the rhythm of everyday speech, is trying to be more honest with himself than if he used, as is too wreckingly easy, the forms and terms already published as the ex-

pression of other people's minds? "Style . . . is not an ornament; it is not an exercise, not a caper, nor complication of any sort. It is the sense of one's self, the knowledge of what one wants to say, and the saying of it in the most fitting words."<sup>1</sup> And that is why it is extremely hard to achieve *a* style, for all these three things are very difficult to attain. Take only the last task, the saying of what one wants to say in the most fitting words. It seems almost impossible, for every time we speak we have virtually to re-create the instrument if we want to be faithful to our idea or feeling. Everywhere the words and phrasing of past generations interpose themselves between us and the reality. "It is . . . a true and lamentable fact that, in ultimate analysis, one cannot speak about anything without altering it to some extent."<sup>2</sup> It is the realization of this, a realization possibly new in our day, which impels authors to try to write as they speak in ordinary life on ordinary physical matters, for it is only in this way that one can achieve fidelity to one's self; otherwise the language and style of the literary tradition assert themselves. But the modern writer must not think of style: the man who thinks first of style is lost: the primary thing to do—this is an old observation—is to think clearly. As M. Jean Cocteau says, writing for modern authors: "Style cannot be a starting-point: it happens. What is style? For a great many people it is a complicated way of saying very

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *The London Book of English Prose*, by Herbert Read and Bonamy Dobrée, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> *The Theory of Speech and Language*, by A. H. Gardiner, Oxford, 1932.

simple things. From our point of view it is a very simple way of saying complicated things.”<sup>1</sup> How does a modern writer tackle this problem? Here, I think, is a good example:

I had great ambitions. I have none now—and have not even the fear of failing. What matters to me and to many of the survivors of my generation is only that which is common to us all, our fear for our children. If it were not for that, I should know how to act in what remains of my life—that would be to withdraw as far as possible from the little world of writing and talking about books which is a microcosm of the whole, its values no finer than those accepted by the rest of the world, and only valid on the assumption that to a writer success means precisely what it means to a stockbroker or a multiple grocer. That is, material wealth, and the respect paid to it. This seems to me a denial of all the writer, the “clerk,” should stand for, but I can do nothing to alter it, and therefore I ought to run away for my life.

After all that turbulence of desire and ambitions it seems strange I should believe now that very little in me is real except the absolute need, intellectual and spiritual, for withdrawal, for resolving to satisfy in my life only the simple wants. It is as strange as that I am only just learning to write and don't care to.

There are days when I retract all this, and think how queer I shall grow if I live alone, and think too that what is needed is some effort to create cells inside the body social, groups of angry, last-minute saints. That would be no good. I should weary in a week of the company of persons who thought and felt no differently from myself.<sup>2</sup>

That, as prose, is simple, easy, fluent, and flexible; what is important, however, is that it is written,

<sup>1</sup> *A Call to Order*, Allen and Unwin, trs., 1933.

<sup>2</sup> From *No Time Like the Present*, by Storm Jameson, Cassell, 1933.

## THE NEW WAY OF WRITING

apparently, in the *tones* of every day, though here and there we can detect traces of literary forms — 'only that which' instead of 'only what'; 'how to act' instead of 'what to do': it is extraordinarily difficult to rid oneself of terms of that kind. But to show how new the tone is, here is a passage from another autobiography written, one always thought, in a natural, confidential manner:

There were perhaps twenty boys in the school at most, and often fewer. I made the excursion between home and school four times a day; if I walked fast, the transit might take five minutes, and, as there were several objects of interest on the way, it might be spread over an hour. In fine weather the going to and from school was very delightful, and small as the scope was, it could be varied almost indefinitely.<sup>1</sup>

There are, we see immediately, one or two obvious "literary" turns in that passage: 'I made the excursion between home and school,' instead of 'I went to and from school'; 'If I walked fast, the transit might take five minutes,' instead of 'I could get there or back (or do the journey) in five minutes'; 'objects of interest,' with others of the same sort. And the general run, which is the important thing, though simple and easy, and we might perhaps admit fluent, is not flexible. Each sentence contains an idea and completes it. The mind comes to a full stop at the end of each phrase. But our minds in life do not work in that way; they are always ready to frame the next sentence, carried on by the impetus of the last. Gosse, in common with the older writers,

<sup>1</sup> From *Father and Son*, by Edmund Gosse, Heinemann, 1907.

was concerned, not to follow the movements of his mind, but to present something concrete.

To say, then, that the hall-mark of good modern prose style is an essential fidelity does not imply that writers of previous generations were charlatans and liars, only that they owed fidelity to other things. And it is here that the spirit of our age imposes itself upon our style. It never occurred to the older writers that they could not take themselves for granted. We can be sure of nothing ; our civilization is threatened, even the simplest things we live by : we are on the verge of amazing changes. In our present confusion our only hope is to be scrupulously honest with ourselves, so honest as to doubt our own minds and the conclusions they arrive at. Most of us have ceased to believe, except provisionally, in truths, and we feel that what is important is not so much truth as the way our minds move towards truths. Therefore, to quote M. Cocteau again, ' Form must be the form of the mind. Not a way of saying things, but of thinking them.' Perhaps that is why we nowadays instinctively mistrust any one who pontificates : and, as a matter of experience, if we examine the writings of the pontificators, people skilled in ' a way of saying things,' we invariably find that their style is bad, that falsity has crept in somewhere. The writer is not being faithful to the movement of his mind ; he is taking things for granted, and he fills us of to-day with uneasiness.

We have, then, to judge of the integrity of a modern writer by this sense of himself that we feel he has. If we are to respond, he must (we suppose) be aware of himself as something a little

## THE NEW WAY OF WRITING

uncertain in this shifting universe : he also is part of the material which he has to treat with respect : he must listen to himself, so to speak, to hear what he has to say. He must not prejudge, or force an issue : we must be able to imagine that he is talking to himself. In no other way can he achieve a style, which is the sound of his voice, which is the man himself.

It is not so simple as it sounds for a man to watch his own mind ; it is as difficult as writing in the way you ordinarily talk : literary habits continually get in the way. Nor must a man write as he might lazily talk, and it is more important than ever for him to reject the dead metaphor which can never be more than an approximation, to choose the exact, the expressive word, to rid his style of fat, to make it athletic. What he must really do, as the first essential, is to keep his awareness athletic, especially his awareness of himself. And he must not watch his mind idly ; he must watch it as he might a delicate piece of machinery doing its work, and he must watch it, not flickering about in every direction, as an active mind does, but only in the direction he wants it to go. Otherwise the result may be disastrous. Even the following extremely clever attempt seems to me an object-lesson :

The problem from this time on became more definite. It was all so nearly alike it must be different and it is different, it is natural that if everything is used and there is a continuous present and a beginning again and again if it is all so alike it must be simply different and everything simply different was the natural way of creating it then.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> From *Composition as Explanation*, by Gertrude Stein, Hogarth Press, 1926.

## MODERN PROSE

One cannot say whether Miss Stein's mind really moves like that: possibly it does, and possibly most of our minds move more like that than we are aware of, or at any rate are prepared to admit. What is clear is that the mere following of the mind, its echoes and repetitions, does not really give its shape; and this makes us realize that to write naturally as the mind would wish to utter is just as much an art—or an artifice—as to write in what we call an artificial style, say that of a Pater or Meredith. What has happened is that the modern writer is faced with new material, and what he has to do is to discover the new form that this material requires.

What seems to us to be lacking in the older prose is the sense of the uninterrupted flow of the mind: Bagehot, for example, appears to cut off this continuum, shall we call it, into arbitrary lengths, as we slice chunks off a cucumber. This is to force on our minds a logic that is not of their own making; and though it may be true that, as T. E. Hulme said, "All styles are only means of subduing the reader," we must not feel that our minds are being forced, and therefore distorted. Perhaps it was George Moore's principal achievement to give this sense of flow: there is hardly an instant's pause in his mental processes. His style is very distinctive; all the time one hears a voice, a personal utterance, though pursued to the lengths to which he took it, or allowed it to carry him, it becomes in the end monotonous. The mind runs on too much; it has no form but that of a stream: no solid shape emerges. But the sort of flow we are talking about can, and sometimes does, take form. Here is an extract



## THE NEW WAY OF WRITING

from Henry James, whose whole being was directed to following the movement of his mind, and who gave form to this movement, not indeed in a language natural to us, but one which seems to have been natural to him, a way which he could not have escaped from even if he had wanted to :

Momentary side-winds—things of no real authority—break in every now and then to put their inferior little questions to me ; but I come back, I come back, as I say, I all throbbingly and yearningly and passionately, oh mon bon come back to this way that is clearly the only one in which I can do anything now, and that will open out to me more and more, and that has overwhelming reasons pleading all beautifully in its breast. What really happens is that the closer I get to the problem of the application of it in any particular case, the more I get *into* that application, so that the more doubts and torments fall away from me, the more I know where I am, the more everything spreads and shines and draws me on and I'm justified in my logic and my passion. . . . Causons, causons, mon bon—oh celestial, soothing, sanctifying process, with all the high sane forces of the sacred time fighting, through it, on my side ! Let me fumble it gently and patiently out—with fever and fidget laid to rest—as in all the old enchanted months ! It only looms, it only shines and shimmers, *too* beautiful and *too* interesting, it only hangs there *too* rich and *too* full and with *too* much to give and to pay ; it only presents itself *too* admirably and *too* vividly, *too* straight and square and vivid, as a little organic and effective Action.<sup>1</sup>

We may think that artificial, but we do not feel, complicated as it is, that this is a literary language. It is the language of Henry James's speech ; it reflects his mind accurately, a mind

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, Macmillan.

with a very definite form. James, if you like, had a tortuous way of thinking, but he had broken down the barriers between his mind and the expression of it.

What we look for, however, is a style which shall be as free and individual as in that passage, but which smacks less of idiosyncrasy, for something we might all use, though, no doubt, not so well as our model, for something which does not give us, as some recent prose does, the uneasy effect of submitting us to a laboratory experiment. Perhaps this is what we want :

The trouble with her ship was that it would *not* sail. It rode water-logged in the rotting port of home. All very well to have wild, reckless moods of irony and independence, if you have to pay for them by withering dustily on the shelf.

Alvina fell again into humility and fear : she began to show symptoms of her mother's heart trouble. For day followed day, month followed month, season after season went by, and she grubbed away like a housemaid in Manchester House, she hurried round doing the shopping, she sang in the choir on Sundays, she attended the various chapel events, she went out to visit friends, and laughed and talked and played games. But all the time, what was there actually in her life ? Not much. She was withering towards old-maiddom. Already in her twenty-eighth year, she spent her days grubbing in the house, whilst her father became an elderly, frail man still too lively in mind and spirit. Miss Pinnegar began to grow grey and elderly too, money became scarcer and scarcer, there was a black day ahead when her father would die and the home be broken up, and she would have to tackle life as a worker.

There lay the only alternative : in work. She might slave her days away teaching the piano, as Miss Frost had done : she might find a subordinate post as nurse : she might sit in the cash-desk of some

## THE NEW WAY OF WRITING

shop. Some work of some sort would be found for her. And she would sink into the routine of her job, as did so many women, and grow old and die, chattering and fluttering. She would have what is called her independence. But, seriously faced with that treasure, and without the option of refusing it, strange how hideous she found it.

Work!—a job! More even than she rebelled against the Withams did she rebel against a job. . . .<sup>1</sup>

It is clear, I imagine, that that could not have been written in the last century; it speaks with the authentic voice of this. It has the ring of what we hear around us every day: it has no air of "style," yet it is extremely expressive. Certain liberties are taken, such as leaving out "It is . . ." before "all very well . . ." in the first paragraph. Here and there we feel just a touch of literary formulas, and we wish they were not there: "as did so many women" instead of "as so many women did," but these things are very rare in Lawrence. We feel that he is nearly always completely free of "literature" and can be himself. We follow his mind working—and he speaks as it works. Or, at least, that is the impression we get. It is not true, of course; but at least he is using his material (part of which is his mind) with complete freedom, and finding a form which will make it tell.

Suppose that we try to prophesy what direction our prose will take. We might perhaps say that it will be in that of greater flexibility and a more curious following of our mental processes, with, sometimes, violence offered to our old notions of syntax wherever we find them distorting or

<sup>1</sup> From *The Lost Girl*, by D. H. Lawrence, Secker, 1920.

## MODERN PROSE

cumbrous. One would like to think that all of us will come to the stage of refusing to write what we would not, indeed could not, say, though that, of course, is not to limit our writing to what we actually do say. This is not to claim for a moment that by writing as we speak we shall achieve a style ; before we do that we must go through at least three fundamental disciplines. First there is that of fidelity to thought, the extremely difficult task of complete honesty ;<sup>1</sup> we must not, as is so easy, allow language to condition our thought : § then there is the labour of finding the exact words and the exact inflexion of phrase to carry the whole sense, the emotional colour, of the words ; and thirdly, it is over and above these things that we have to model our prose to give it what seems to be the run and structure of our usual speaking. That is where the artifice comes in, and that is where we can achieve the art.

*Modern Prose Style.* 1934.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT  
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS